

THE ART OF POPULAR FICTION  
GENDER, AUTHORSHIP AND  
AESTHETICS IN THE WRITING OF  
OUIDA

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### Abstract

This thesis examines the popular Victorian novelist Ouida (Maria Louisa Ramé) in the context of women's authorship in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first of its two intentions is to recuperate some of the historical and literary significance of this critically neglected writer by considering on her own terms her desire to be recognised as a serious artist. More broadly, it begins to fill in the gap that exists in scholarship on women's authorship as it pertains to those writers who come between George Eliot, the last of the 'great' mid-Victorian women novelists, and the New Woman novelists of the *fin de siècle*. Four of Ouida's novels have been chosen for critical analysis, each of which was written at an important moment in the history of the nineteenth century novel. Her early novel *Strathmore* (1865) is shaped by the rebelliousness towards gendered models of authorship characteristic of women writers who began their careers in the 1860s. In this novel, Ouida undermines the binary oppositions of gender that were in large part constructed and maintained by the domestic novel and which controlled the representation and reception of women's authorship in the mid-nineteenth century. *Tricotrín* (1869) was written at the end of the sensation fiction craze, a phenomenon that resulted in the incipient splitting of the high art novel from the popular novel. In *Tricotrín*, Ouida responds to

the gendered ideology of occupational professionalism that was being deployed to distinguish between masculinised serious and feminised popular fiction, an ideology that rendered her particularly vulnerable as a popular writer. Ouida's autobiographical novel *Friendship* (1878) is also written at an critical period in the novel's ascent to high art. Registering the way in which the morally weighted realism favoured by novelists and critics at the mid-century was being overtaken by a desire for more formally oriented, serious fiction, Ouida takes the opportunity both to defend her novels against the realist critique of her fiction and to attempt to shape the new literary aesthetic in a way that positively incorporated femininity and the feminine. Finally, *Princess Napraxine* (1884) is arguably the first British novel seriously to incorporate the imagery and theories of aestheticism. In this novel, Ouida resists male aesthetes' exploitative attempts to obscure their relationship to the developing consumer culture while confidently finding a place for the woman artist within British aestheticism and signalling a new acceptance of her own involvement in the marketplace. Together, these novels track Ouida's self-conscious response to a changing literary marketplace that consistently marginalised women writers at the same time that they enable us to begin to uncover the complexity of female authorship in the second half of the nineteenth century.

## **Introduction**

The year 2008 marks the centenary of the death of Ouida (Maria Louisa Ramé). Despite her prominence as a popular novelist and polemical thinker during the second half of the nineteenth century, however, her cultural and literary significance is only just beginning to be understood. Largely familiar to us today as the best-selling but now obscure author of racy high-society novels, she was also a political campaigner who took an intense interest in the lives of the Italian peasants, an ardent animal rights activist, an environmental campaigner, an outspoken atheist and, perhaps surprisingly, the author of two essays stridently opposing female suffrage. Most importantly for this study, she was, in addition, intensely serious about her role as an artist and extraordinarily sensitive and responsive to changes in the contemporary literary climate.

By taking this fascinating and illuminating writer as my subject, I have two broad intentions. The first of these is, in the face of the current critical neglect of Ouida, to present her to the reader as a subject deserving of critical attention and, building on the small but significant work that has been carried out on her, to add to those ways in which her cultural and literary importance are beginning to be recognised. More broadly, I use Ouida and her fiction to expand our current understanding of women's authorship in the

second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the context of the much-neglected generation of writers who come between the ‘great’ mid-century women writers and the New Woman writers at the end of the century. This introduction is composed of four parts that correspond to these aims. I start by introducing Ouida to the reader and giving a brief overview of her life and writing. I then take the opportunity to present, for the first time, a comprehensive review of contemporary scholarship about her. After this, I set up the main body of my thesis by placing Ouida in the context of current scholarship about women’s authorship, before, in the last section of the introduction, outlining the arguments in the chapters that follow.

## I. INTRODUCING OUIDA

As a writer who is likely to be familiar to few, Ouida, and her changing relationship to various literary and aesthetic discourses throughout her writing career, first require some introduction.<sup>1</sup> Before metamorphosing into Marie Louise de la Ramée, the name that is usually assigned to her, she was born Maria Louisa Ramé in 1839 in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, to an English mother and a French father. Her father, who is rumoured to have been an agent for Louis Napoleon, was absent for much of her childhood and finally disappeared around 1857.

After moving to London at about the time of her father's disappearance, Ouida began writing in order to support her mother and grandmother. She was discovered by W. Harrison Ainsworth, the editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, who published her first short stories in 1859 under the pen name Ouida, a childhood mispronunciation of "Louisa." Her first novel, *Granville de Vigne: A Tale of the Day*, was serialised in the *New Monthly Magazine* from 1861 to 1863; the novel was then published by Tinsley in three volumes under the title *Held in Bondage* and was an "enormous success" (Bigland 30). *Held in Bondage* and the early short stories that were later published under the title *Cecil Castlemaine's Gage* (1867) are strongly influenced by the hyper-masculine novelist George Alfred Lawrence and successfully capitalised on what Anthony Powell describes as the "cult" following that Lawrence commanded amongst "young men" (x) at the time.<sup>2</sup> The narrative voice that Ouida uses in this fiction is, consequently, an explicitly masculine one. *Held in Bondage*, which features a spurned lover who exacts revenge on the novel's hero by disguising herself and tricking him into marriage, is also plainly influenced by the women's sensation novels that were just beginning to dominate the literary marketplace during this period.

The success of *Held in Bondage* opened up publishing opportunities for Ouida. It was followed by the equally successful novel *Strathmore*



(1865), which was originally accepted by Tinsley to be published in three volume format, but, thanks to the dislike for Ouida of one of the firm's partners, was passed onto Chapman and Hall, who became her publishers for the next fourteen years. *Strathmore* also brought Ouida contracts with Lippincott in the United States and Tauchnitz in continental Europe. More bestsellers followed in quick succession: *Chandos* (1866), *Under Two Flags* (1867) (which was eventually to become her most successful novel) and *Idalia* (1867). *Strathmore*, *Chandos*, *Under Two Flags* and *Idalia* set the formula for which Ouida has become best known: luxurious aristocratic settings, impossibly gallant heroes and dramatic plotting. They are much more confidently original than either *Held in Bondage* or the short stories in *Cecil Castlemaine's Gage* and no longer utilise the explicitly masculine voice of this early fiction. While they retain elements of Lawrence, particularly in the portrayal of their dashing male heroes, these heroes are, as I will discuss further in the context of *Strathmore* in Chapter 1, complicated by homosexual and feminine qualities. Ouida's decision to move away from Lawrence signals a new confidence in rebelling against contemporary gendering of authorship, a theme that, as I will show in this thesis, characterises her work from that moment on.

The publication of *Tricotrín* in 1869, the first of Ouida's novels to have an artist as its central character, sounded a more serious note in her

fiction; in addition, this novel, as I will also later argue, responded to the gendered split between high and popular art that was beginning to be felt in the wake of the sensation craze of the 1860s. The novels that follow *Tricotrín* in the 1870s and the first part of the 1880s are her most innovative and artistically self-conscious, and they explore a range of new subjects and styles. *Puck* (1870), her next work, is an experimental novel that has a dog as its central character, while *Folle-Farine* (1871) features startling themes of masochism and abjection.

*Folle-Farine* was the last novel that Ouida published while in England; in 1871 she and her mother left for the Continent, where they toured Belgium and Germany before settling in Florence. The influence of Belgium and Germany is evident in her next work, a collection of sentimental short stories titled *A Dog of Flanders and Other Stories* (1872). It was Italy, however, that was to prove the most powerful influence on Ouida's writing, and in 1873 she published *Pascarel*, the first of her novels to be set in that country. *Pascarel* is simultaneously unabashed romance and rhapsodic travel book, framed by the fantastic Veronese Carnival. It was followed by a collection of children's stories, *Two Little Wooden Shoes* (1874), and the novel *Signa* (1875), which was the first of Ouida's novels to centre on the Italian peasantry, a recurring theme in her later fiction. During this period, Ouida was at the height of her fame, entertained many visitors,

and spent the money that she earned recklessly and extravagantly. She was notorious not only for her breathtaking rudeness, but also for the numerous spoilt and untrained dogs that she kept at her home.

Ouida published one more work with Chapman and Hall, the short novel *In A Winter City* (1876), before the firm sold her copyrights behind her back to Chatto and Windus (Phillips 'Publishers' 213). This led to her next novel, *Ariadne* (1877), being issued, to Ouida's surprise, by both publishers (Phillips 'Publishers' 214). Despite her fury at being dealt with in this way, Ouida remained with Chatto and Windus for the next seventeen years, although she increasingly offered her fiction to other firms.

During the late 1870s, Ouida began publicly to defend her critical reputation against the attacks on her fiction that had plagued her career from the beginning. In 1878, she published the autobiographical novel *Friendship*, in which she strikes back at criticism of her extravagant plots and lack of realism. Letters in response to reviews of her fiction followed: in 1880, she wrote to the *Times* defending her novel *Moths* (1880), in 1881, she published a letter in the *Contemporary Review* responding to Mary Calvery's criticism of her novel *In a Village Commune* (1881), and in 1883 she wrote first to the *Athenaeum*, defending her novel *Wanda*, and then to the *Times*, defending her fiction against criticism of its realism. Ouida was also now becoming increasingly interested in political issues. Her next novel after *Friendship*,

the enormously successful *Moths*, tackles the issue of marriage and marriage laws, a topical subject that foreshadows the New Woman writers. After *Moths*, Ouida published a collection of short stories titled *Pipistrello and Other Stories* (1880) before returning to political concerns in *A Village Commune*, a blistering critique of the abuse of power of the politicians who were elected to Italy's village commune. According to Elaine Bigland, *A Village Commune* "caused a tremendous stir" (158) and elicited "support for the peasant cause" from "all over Europe and from America" (160). Ouida's interest in political affairs is also evident in the essays that she published from the 1880s on as she sought to establish herself as a prominent political and literary thinker in addition to her success as a popular novelist. These essays attend to topics that include literary criticism, political commentary, feminism and animal rights activism, and they were published in journals that include the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Nineteenth Century*, the *North American Review* and Oscar Wilde's *Woman's World*.

After the publication of *A Village Commune*, another collection of children's stories, *Bimbi: Stories for Children* (1882), and two more novels, *In Maremma* (1882) and *Wanda* (1883), soon followed. In 1883, Ouida branched out into an entirely new literary form, publishing four plays in the collection *Frescoes*. Her fiction from around this period is notable for its engagement with themes and styles that were associated with the

increasingly prominent contemporary cult of aestheticism. Her next novel, *Princess Napraxine* (1884), was, as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Four, arguably the first novel in Britain seriously to incorporate late nineteenth century aestheticism. *Princess Napraxine* was followed by a sequel, *Othmar* (1885), and two novellas, *A Rainy June* (1885, published by Maxwell) and *Don Guesaldo* (1886, published by Routledge).

In 1886, Ouida returned to England. Although she was a social success, her reckless spending finally caught up with her and in March 1887 she was forced to depend on friends' assistance to pay her debts in England so she could return to Italy, where she again faced a raft of debt. In 1888, she was evicted from her residence at Farinola and moved to a new home in the Via de Serragli. Her financial problems continued and she was soon evicted again. During this period, she published a novella, *A House Party* (1887, Hurst and Blackett), two novels, *Guilderoy* (1889) and *Syrlin* (1890), and a collection of short stories titled *Ruffino and Other Stories* (1890). After a visit to Austria and Venice, Ouida returned to Florence and published another collection of short stories, *Santa Barbara and Other Tales* (1891) and a short novel titled *The Tower of Taddeo* (Heinemann, 1892).

In 1892, Ouida's beloved mother died; too poor to pay for her mother's funeral expenses, she "kept her mother's body upstairs long after it should have been buried because she could not endure the thought of laying

her in a pauper's grave" (Bigland 209). Depressed, increasingly reclusive, and stubbornly refusing all offers of assistance, she was evicted again in 1894 and left Florence for Lucca. By now, Ouida was on "exceedingly bad terms" (Bigland 212) with Andrew Chatto, and the last book of hers to be published with Chatto and Windus, *Two Offenders and Other Tales*, was published in 1894. From that year on, she drifted from publisher to publisher. Her fiction became increasingly repetitive as she desperately tried to raise money; meanwhile, her sales were steadily declining (Weedon *Victorian Publishing* 149-51). A volume containing two stories, *The Silver Christ and a Lemon Tree*, was issued by Unwin in 1894, followed by the anti-vivisectionist novella *Toxin* (1895). In 1895, she published a collection of critical essays titled *Views and Opinions* with Methuen, and a year later she published *Le Selve and Other Tales* (1896) with Unwin. In 1897, she published *The Massarenes* with Sampson Low; it was the only story she ever wrote that dealt with the middle-classes. *The Massarenes* was followed by the novella *An Altruist* (Unwin, 1897), the collection *La Strega and Other Stories* (Sampson Low, 1899) and the short novel *The Waters of Edera* (Unwin, 1900). In 1900, she published a second volume of critical essays, *Critical Studies* (Unwin), and a year later published her last complete work, *Street Dust and Other Stories* in 1901 (White and Bell).

In 1903, the sons of Ouida's current landlord violently and illegally evicted her. This led to the collapse of her health, and although she won the court case she brought against them, she never received the damages she was awarded. By 1907, news of Ouida's plight had reached England, and, to her rage, the novelist Marie Corelli wrote a letter to the *Daily Mail*, soliciting contributions for a fund to assist the aging author. Ouida was again "sent ... into fresh transports of fury" (Bigland 259) when, at the request of her friends, she was awarded a Civil List Pension of £150 a year. In 1908, she died from pneumonia, deep in poverty and accompanied by only her maid and her beloved dogs. Her last novel, *Helianthus*, was published posthumously and incomplete later that year by Macmillan.

## II. OUIDA: A CRITICAL SURVEY

As I will examine in more detail in this thesis, Ouida suffered from a good deal of critical derision during her lifetime. However, she also elicited admiration from quarters that may seem unlikely today: according to one of Bigland's sources, Sir Shane Leslie, the Pre-Raphaelites, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones, "loved Ouida" (76), as did Cardinal Manning. John Ruskin, who in *The Art of England* praised *A Village Commune* for its "photographic" (283) realism, was another of

Ouida's devotees. Other admirers include Edward Bulwer-Lytton and G. J. Whyte Melville, who both wrote letters to Ouida praising her fiction (Lee 58), Max Beerbohm and the aesthetic theorist Vernon Lee.

Such critical approbation notwithstanding, Ouida has for the most part been neglected by modern scholars. Her rather scandalous personal life and often disagreeable personality have, to be sure, fascinated many: there have been no fewer than four biographies written about her in the twentieth century, and another, by scholar Jane Jordan, will be released this year.<sup>3</sup> However, like other popular women writers, she received almost no critical attention until the late 1970s. Since then, critical interest in her has slowly but steadily increased, although it has been surprisingly small compared with writers of comparable popularity like Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood, Charlotte Yonge or Marie Corelli. Nonetheless, the significant work that has been carried out on Ouida during the 1990s and the early years of the twenty-first century means that there can at last be said to be a solid body of scholarship on her. To date, a full critical survey of this scholarship has not been done.<sup>4</sup> Existing lists of criticism on her are for the most part badly outdated, and the best of the critical surveys, Natalie Schroeder's discussion of twentieth-century responses to Ouida in her introduction to the recently republished edition of *Moths*, only mentions eight works from 1930 to the



present day. This centenary year is an apposite time to take stock of this criticism.

Ouida's popularity rapidly faded after her death in 1908 and the general critical consensus from around the 1920s on was that her style of fiction was outdated.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, most of the scanty critical attention that was paid to Ouida during the first half of the century is merely evaluative or briskly factual. Some opinions of her were entirely negative, such as Walter C. Phillip's 1919 assessment of her as worth notice for her "egregious exemplificatio[n]" of sensation fiction's "voluptuousness of description" (30) or Malcolm Elwin's scathing chapter in *Victorian Wallflowers* (1934), which concedes to her neither "humour, reality[,] ... humanity" (282), originality nor artistic integrity. More positive critical appraisals were offered by G. K. Chesterton in his 1913 *The Victorian Age in Literature* and Carl Van Vechten in his fond assessment of her fiction in 1926, while Anthony Powell, in the introduction to a 1947 collection of novels that included *Moths*, finds "an extraordinary vitality in the presentation of her narrative" (xii).<sup>6</sup>

From the late 1970s on, there was some interest in Ouida's publishing history. In 1978, Celia Phillips published two articles, one looking at the publishing history of *Under Two Flags* and the other looking at Ouida's relationship with Frederic Chapman and Andrew Chatto. Phillips's research,

which emphasises the exploitative practices of these men, does not seem to have been taken into account by R. C. Terry, who in 1983 discussed Ouida's "notorious" "dealings with publishers" (35). In 1985, Simon Eliot included Ouida amongst the authors considered in his survey of cheap reprints in the second half of the nineteenth century; he outlines the increasingly short periods between the issuing of three volume editions of Ouida's novels and the publication of cheap reprints during the 1860s and 70s. More recently, in *Victorian Publishing: The Economics of Book Production for a Mass Market 1836-1916* (2003), Alexis Weedon uses Ouida, together with Wilkie Collins, as a case study for the changes in British publishing that took place during the period 1870 to 1930. Weedon examines Ouida's uncertainty about Chatto and Windus's attempt to maximise profits in an increasingly competitive market by quickly issuing cheap reprints, as well as the latter's attempt to boost her declining sales after the late 1870s by issuing cheap editions of her earlier novels. Weedon also surveys the films that were based on Ouida's novels between 1913 and 1936.<sup>7</sup>

More general essays attending to Ouida during the first part of the second half of the nineteenth century include E. D. Tappe's discussion of her use of Moldavia in 'Ouida's "Idalia": The Source of Its Moldavian Scenes' (1959) and Edgar F. Harden's discussion of *Moths*'s Fuschia Leach in his 1963 essay 'The American Girl in British Fiction, 1860-1880,' where it is

concluded that this character is “perhaps the first full-fledged appearance of the young American title-seeker, a type which is to achieve increasingly greater prominence in English fiction,” and therefore “both a culmination and a portent” (281). In 1976, Charity Chang published a slight (in both size and analysis) essay titled “‘The Nürnberg Stove’ as an Artistic Fairy Tale,” in which it is argued that the principal character of that children’s story undertakes a journey that results in “awareness of his own identity” (154). Ellen Jordan’s 1983 essay ‘The Christening of the New Woman,’ meanwhile, credits Ouida with naming the New Woman in an 1894 essay that “selected out the phrase ‘the New Woman’ and supplied the all-important capital letters” (20). Ouida is also included in Kenneth Churchill’s 1980 survey on *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930*, in which she is described as “[t]he most significant English novelist to write on Italy in the 1870s” (162). While Churchill considers her novels to be largely sentimental and unsophisticated, he argues that she “offer[s] her reader two new kinds of feeling towards the country, both of which, after she had introduced them, go on to culminate in important aspects of Lawrence’s Italian work” (162): first, “a particular stress in her treatment of the attraction of Italy to the northerner” (162), which is largely based on a perception of an ancient “joyous celebration of life” (163); second, she is “the first English writer to chronicle the sense of growing disillusion” (164) with the outcome of the

struggle against the Austrians. Other discussions of Ouida's fiction from around this period tend to be brief and of limited interest. In 1980 her critical reputation was poor enough for Ian Greenlees to describe the "cruel ironical fate" faced by Ouida, the "mere mention" of whose name "evokes a dismissive smile or sneer," despite the fact that "very few people have read her novels" (234).

Such critical evaluations notwithstanding, Ouida did benefit from the general interest in recuperating popular women writers that first became noticeable in the 1970s. The first sign of this is in Elaine Showalter's seminal *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing* (1977), where Showalter names Ouida amongst the group of women writers who began their writing careers in the 1860s. According to Showalter, these women shed the anxieties experienced by earlier women writers and embraced "[a]ll the commercial, competitive, self-promoting aspects of the literary life that had been played down or ignored by the first two generations of nineteenth century women writers" (154). Not only did they "enjo[y] the management end of publishing and deligh[t] in exerting professional power," she argues, but "[i]n their writing, the sensationalists especially" (and Showalter regards Ouida as a sensationalist (334)) "valued passion and assertive action" (154) in rejection of the appropriately 'feminine' subjects to which earlier women writers restrained themselves.

Showalter thus implicitly sees Ouida, together with the other writers of her generation, as confident and rebellious in her writing and her professional life, qualities that are very different from those of the women writers a generation earlier.

Another important early feminist text on Victorian women's writing, Patricia Stubbs's *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel, 1880-1920* (1979), briefly discusses *Moths*, although, as Carol Poster notes, she seems to "have been alienated by Ouida's strident anti-suffrage stand" (300), and consequently dismisses her as outwardly daring but fundamentally conventional. Ouida fares better in Sally Mitchell's *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women's Reading 1835-1880* (1981), which devotes several pages to Ouida's fiction of the 1870s. Mitchell observes that, in a period when "conservatism" and "censorship ... made it hard for writers to discuss sensitive issues in any but the most simplistic terms," Ouida "wrote about very little except love and illicit sex," and is thus significant for "illuminat[ing] some of the crosscurrents of a transitional decade" (137). Like Showalter, she classifies Ouida as a sensation novelist and regards her as a "professed and sometimes vocal antifeminist" who disliked "the characteristics" women "acquired through socialization" (138). As far as the novels themselves are concerned, Mitchell examines Ouida's simultaneous belief that, on one hand, "love as the soul's mystic worship of something

finer than itself” is “the noblest of human characteristics” and, on the other hand, that men, unlike women, “can never find something superior to himself in a mere woman.” This stance, Mitchell argues, leads her into “paradoxical situations” (139). Mitchell explores this in the context of *Folle-Farine* and *Ariadne* and ends with a brief discussion of *Moths* (1880), Ouida’s “most shocking book of all” (140), which she deems the first novel “in England to show a divorced woman utterly happy” (140). Thus, while Mitchell stresses Ouida’s antifeminism, she also emphasises her critical stance with respect to contemporary attitudes towards women and marriage.

The first major piece of modern criticism to be published on Ouida is Natalie Schroeder’s essay, ‘Feminine Sensationalism, Eroticism, and Self-Assertion: M. E. Braddon and Ouida’ (1988). Schroeder regards the “sensational novels” of Ouida, together with Braddon, as “especially significant today for what they reveal about Victorian women’s resistance to conventionally prescribed social roles” (87). Specifically, she sees Braddon’s and Ouida’s novels as symptomatic of “Victorian women’s attempts to rebel against the conventional feminine ideal” and argues that “these feminist struggles” are often disguised “in the erotic elements of the novel,” so that “[s]exuality becomes a key element in determining feminine power and self-assertion” (90). Schroeder discusses this thesis in the context of two of Ouida’s novels, *Folle-Farine* and *Strathmore*. While she concedes that “for

the most part sensation novelists” such as Ouida “bow to convention, and ... punish feminine bids for power”—in fact, she notes that “Ouida at times seems more anti-feminist than feminist, more allied with than ranged against the critics who chastised female writers” (99)—she nonetheless believes that “[e]ven through these punishments ... the authors communicate a subversive message” (98). Thus while Ouida repeatedly insists on the temporality of women’s sexual power, she also “treats” Lady Vavasour, the villainess in *Strathmore*, “sympathetically as she sinks lower and lower, simply because she is a female” and “maintains a somewhat ironic attitude toward Strathmore’s success” (99). In arguing this, Schroeder is particularly interesting for refusing simply to treat Ouida as an anti-feminist and for seeing feminism in her novels, a stance that has arguably been influential in later work.

The 1990s saw more interest in Ouida’s fiction. In 1991, Adeline R. Tintner included a section in *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James: An Intertextual Study* on Ouida’s influence on Henry James. Tintner argues that the eponymous woman writer in James’s short story ‘Greville Fane’ is modelled on Ouida, and identifies similarities between her novella *A House Party* and James’s *The Sacred Fount*. Two years later, John Paul Russo published an essay titled ‘Ouida’s Family Romance: *In Maremma*,’ a psychoanalytic-theory influenced analysis of her 1882 novel that traces the

fictional incarnation of her unresolved feelings with her own father. Russo's argument is echoed in Jane Jordan's essay 'Ouida: The Enigma of a Literary Identity' (1995), which also identifies Ouida's search for a father figure in novels that include *In Maremma*, although the essay itself has a much broader focus. Observing that Ouida is "much neglected" even by scholars of the "female sensation novel, which was Ouida's own" (75), Jordan regards her as significant for her "serious underlying engagement with significant social and political concerns, with her cultural situation as a woman writer, and with her own psychological legacy" (91). Ouida's fiction reveals, for example, "an intense curiosity about homosexuality" (92-3), a topical subject in the 1860s. Likewise, novels like *Moths*, *Wanda* and *Guilderoy* engage with "the contemporary debate about the status of women in marriage" (97). Jordan also discusses Ouida's self-conscious construction of her literary identity, which in various ways was part of an attempt to hide her gender. Finally, she expands on Schroeder's argument that Ouida's seeming conservatism towards women is countered by a subversive radicalism, stating that "[t]he radical understandings which we can derive from these novels are significantly incongruous with Ouida's conservative sentiments on the Woman Question" (99) in her two essays. Noting that "Ouida's anti-feminist reputation has endured despite her relatively few polemical writings on the subject" (99), Jordan adds that "[h]er very divided sympathies are ...



indicated by the fact that her sole pro-feminist article, which promotes female higher education, ‘The Woman Problem,’ penned in 1883 ... was sold to Lippincott under the stipulation that it be published only after her death” (99). Again, then, Jordan’s willingness to see beyond the surface of Ouida’s conservatism generates productive analysis.

The same year that Jordan’s essay was published, Oxford University Press issued a new edition of *Under Two Flags*, edited by John Sutherland. In his introduction to the novel, Sutherland argues that Ouida “deserves rather more of a literary reputation than posterity has allowed her” (xiii). He regards *Under Two Flags* as a novel of enduring influence: it “defined,” he says, “a set of romantic stereotypes and narrative formulae now inseparably associated with the ‘Foreign Legion’” (ix). In particular, Sutherland traces *Under Two Flags*’s influence on P. C. Wren’s *Beau Geste* and its sequels, which, Sutherland argues, “deriv[e]” the “basic *donnée* ... of the English aristocrat self-sacrificially joining the French Army to protect the good name of those near to him ... directly from *Under Two Flags*” (x). He also sees reincarnations of Ouida’s novel in the Foreign Legion films of the twentieth century. Aside from this, Sutherland interprets *Under Two Flags* largely as a projection of Ouida’s fantasies about herself, and, like earlier critics, is unable to resist reading *Under Two Flags* as a “dramatiz[ation]” of Ouida’s “romantic fantasies about her lost father” (xvii).

The next significant critical article to address Ouida is Carol Poster's 'Oxidization is a Feminist Issue: Acidity, Canonicity, and Popular Victorian Female Authors,' published in *College English* in 1996. Poster's essay is an urgent call to arms, decrying critical neglect of women writers like Ouida, Broughton, Braddon and Marie Corelli and warning that their works are in danger of being lost entirely because the acid paper on which they were printed is "currently oxidizing" (287). Poster's fears about the imminent loss of novels by Ouida, Broughton, Braddon and Corelli may be overstated—the complete works of all of these writers had already been committed to microfiche as part of the British Fiction Archive project by the end of the 1980s—but her denunciation of critical neglect of women writers like Ouida, whom she uses as a case-study (and rather strangely includes amongst authors of "domestic sensationalism" (297)), is nonetheless timely. While she ultimately concludes that "Ouida's stylistic lapses and exaggerated plots and characters preclude her from being ranked among the major writers of the century" (301), she touches on the arbitrary nature of the literary canon that has excluded her, pointing out that Ouida is "a non-literary author because, despite enormous sales figures, her books have not been widely discussed by literary critics" (293-4); however, "[b]ecause she is a non-literary author, she is therefore not a legitimate subject for scholarly articles, books, or dissertations, except within the extremely limited confines of

‘women’ studies’ or ‘popular culture’” (294). Poster also suggests that “[d]espite Ouida’s overt anti-suffrage stance, three of her novels should be of interest to contemporary feminists precisely for their construction of ... women characters who appropriate all the characteristics of the male hero, including physical courage, strength, and intelligence, and yet are still portrayed favorably” (300). These characters are Cigarette in *Under Two Flags*, Muriella in *La Selve* and Nerine in *The Waters of Edera*. While all these heroines are “eventually killed violently,” their “deaths do not result from weakness, nor are they punishments for transgressions—theirs is a death with honor” (300). In this way, Poster echoes Jordan’s and Schroeder’s insistence on looking past Ouida’s overt conservatism, even if her reading of Ouida is rather more limited than those scholars’. Like Jordan, Schroeder and Mitchell, Poster also notices elements of “social critique” in Ouida’s fiction, such as her portrayal of the Zu-Zu in *Under Two Flags*, although she limits such critique to “moments” (301) in the text.

A year after Poster’s essay was published, Pamela Gilbert discussed Ouida, together with Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Rhoda Broughton, in her monograph *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women’s Popular Novels* (1997). Gilbert’s book broadly focuses on popular women’s fiction as a site of coalescence of anxieties about boundary transgression, which she argues are linked with gender and the gendered body. Ouida’s novels, she

claims, provoke anxiety by transgressing boundaries between classes, both by enabling her working class readership to peer into the lives of her aristocratic subjects, and (at least in her early fiction), by representing boundary transgression between classes in the novels themselves (85). Building on the work of Catherine Gallagher, Gilbert explores the way in which popular female authorship during this period is represented as prostitution, arguing that Ouida sidesteps this association by “refus[ing] any identification with commercialism” and seeing herself “as an artist, constitutionally above such petty concerns” (86).

The main part of Gilbert’s discussion of Ouida takes place in a chapter that examines the novels *Under Two Flags* and *Folle-Farine*. Gilbert traces the “female body under capitalism,” which, like the prostitute, becomes “a sexualized body which derives its value from its capacity for exchange,” or, alternatively, “achieves its value in the moment in which it is withdrawn from exchange and becomes ‘safe capital’ as someone’s wife” (141). She argues that the “common thread” in Ouida’s fiction is the link between “power” and “the commodification of the body” (141), and analyses in particular the way in which Ouida’s “good” women ... rarely escape unscathed” from the “realm of exchange, which pressures them to become commodities themselves” (141). These women, Gilbert argues, are “inexorably drawn” into “the realm of exchange ... thus losing their

identities as subjects, a process figured through the opening of their bodies by sex, violence, and illness,” and it is “[o]nly through self-sacrifice” that they can “paradoxically ‘save’ themselves, destroying their bodies to cancel out their shameful openness” (141). Gilbert also sees in Ouida’s treatment of power, gender and exchange “some of the passionate uncertainty gripping Victorians in their attitude toward the colonial and imperial project” (142), which is revealed by the way in which “Ouida repeatedly draws parallels between femininity and colonial identity” and “tend[s]” to make “her tragic women ... hybrids” (141).

As all this suggests, Gilbert engages with earlier scholars’ attempts to open Ouida’s fiction up for serious critical attention. Like these scholars, she looks at the ways in which Ouida’s fiction complicates her overt conservatism with regard to gender. For example, if Ouida is openly anti-feminist, Gilbert argues, she yet “grants ... women a remarkable power and energy in manipulating and controlling their environment, and a capacity for doing damage that may have been a potent attractant for female readers who felt that their own control of their lives was at best tenuous” (144). Likewise, Gilbert examines the way in which the feminisation of the Bertie Cecil, the hero of *Under Two Flags*, “offer[s] the woman reader ... the opportunity to identify with the male protagonist ... and thus to enjoy sexual, geographical, and aggressive freedoms without fear of reprisal” (158), while “Cigarette

provides a vehicle for ... what Judith Fetterly calls the ‘resisting reader[,]’ a voice with which to protest the narrator’s gender- and class-role double standard” (158). (Indeed, Gilbert sees Ouida’s entire moral system in that novel as ambivalent, an ambivalence that she claims is reflected in her treatment of class and colonialism.) Gilbert also reiterates Jordan’s emphasis on Ouida’s conscious construction of her literary identity and the issues of gender involved in this, noting that she was “a tireless self-creator, and consummate performer of her identity as an artist” (140). Elsewhere, Gilbert argues that Ouida “flouted gender conventions openly, both in her ‘personal’ (public) life and her writing” (87). Gilbert is also one of the few critics to challenge the categorisation of Ouida as a sensation writer, arguing that “her writing is much closer to what we refer to today as society novels” (87).

Gilbert reworks some of the themes of *Desire, Disease and the Body* in ‘Ouida and the Other New Woman’ (1999). In this essay, which also looks at *Under Two Flags* and *Folle-Farine*, Gilbert again acknowledges Ouida’s “vocal” antifeminism and opposition to the New Women, noting that her political views, “combined with stylistic extravagance, ha[ve] contributed to render [her] invisible within today’s canon” (170). Gilbert goes on to expand her earlier argument about the way in which Ouida combines outward opposition to feminism with subversion of gender mores, interpreting her “conservatism” as “formulated through a radical rhetoric” (170) that in many

ways anticipates the New Woman. Gilbert argues that Ouida's points of connection with the New Women can be seen most clearly in her "racial hybrids": heroines like *Cigarette* and *Folle-Farine* whose "hybridity both grants" them "more freedom to act, and dooms them as tragic characters for whom no narrative is ultimately possible in the normative social world into which other characters must be integrated" (173). At the same time that such characters invoke aspects of the New Woman, however, "these characteristics are used in the narrative to transfer power to male characters rather than to realize a goal of female empowerment," thus exposing "the way both women and racial others are used to consolidate imperial masculinity" (174). Again, "[t]he enactment of this drama of racial and gendered (dis)integration is imbricated in discourses on race, empire, gender, economics and the body, which would later be part of the broader New Woman cultural debate" (174). As these arguments indicate, Gilbert's work is, all in all, an example of the kind of sophisticated critical analysis made possible by the groundwork laid by critics like Mitchell, Schroeder and Jordan, and shows how richly Ouida's fiction can be made to yield material for cultural analysis. In the chapters that follow, I build upon the more nuanced understanding of Ouida's work that the willingness of these scholars to see beyond her reputation as a merely popular novelist has facilitated.

A brief, but interesting, analysis of Ouida's fiction published around this time is John Peck's discussion of *Under Two Flags* in *War, The Army and Victorian Literature* (1998). Peck sees in *Under Two Flags* "contempt" for the "middle-class application" (120) represented by men like Sir Henry Havelock and suggests that while "Ouida might seem an entirely frivolous novelist[,] ... her works represent another voice, possibly a significant voice of opposition, in the cultural consensus of the 1860s" (120-1). Like Gilbert and Schroeder, he identifies the way in which Ouida's heroes "frequently ... become dependent on women" (121); together with the "Willean sexual ambiguity" of the novel's hero, this suggests that "[t]he masculine energies of the soldier are being questioned" (121).

The most important research that has been carried out on Ouida, however, is that of Talia Schaffer, who examines her as part of a wider project of recuperating women's contribution to British aestheticism in *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (2000). Schaffer splits Ouida's oeuvre into three periods, beginning with the early part of her career, from 1859-79. During this period, Schaffer argues, Ouida's work "centers on various images of male subjectivity, particularly artists and dandies" (124), a phenomenon that she explores in *Under Two Flags*. The next period, from 1880-90, Schaffer sees as characterised by the transformation of "Gothic discourses into depictions of aesthetic life" (124).



In exploring this, she first looks at Ouida's novel *Moths*, tracing her adoption of the conventions of the Gothic novel, particularly its "profound ambivalence about female behavior" (127). Schaffer then examines Ouida's reversal of Gothic conventions in the play *Afternoon*, in which the "innocent, pastoral girl tortured by the aristocratic husband" grows up, fakes her own death, and returns as "a powerful adversary" (132) in a "reversed, revenge-fantasy version of the Gothic" (133). Significantly, Schaffer sees Ouida deploying in this text an epigrammatic language that the female characters use to critique the objectifying, aestheticising gaze of the male protagonists. The last text that Schaffer examines from this period, *Princess Napraxine*, is described as "stag[ing] a battle between the Gothic and the aesthetic genres" and the "two versions of Victorian femininity" (139)—the passive angel in the house, represented by the character of Yseulte, and the daring, independent woman, represented by the Princess Napraxine—respectively associated with them. According to Schaffer, this split replicates Ouida's own "troubled dual allegiance" (139): on one hand, she was a "single woman who made a career, a name, and a fortune through her own unaided work" (139); on the other, she publicly expressed her antifeminism and "wrote an infamous anti-New Woman article" (139-40). Thus "[w]hile Ouida uses the aesthetic language of the epigram for Princess Napraxine," she gives Yseulte "another sort of aesthetic diction ... the archaic, nostalgic language we have

seen in fantasias” (147). This technique enables her “to express her loyalty to both the New Woman and the traditional lady simultaneously” (140).

*Princess Napraxine*, Schaffer argues, was the zenith of Ouida’s creative powers, and during the last part of her writing career, she continued to rewrite the story of *Princess Napraxine* until she “finally ran out of ideas” (150). Despite this, Schaffer importantly sees Ouida as a significant influence on British aestheticism. She argues, for example, that the dandies of her early fiction “prefigure a later paradigm: the golden lads, the Dorians, of male homoerotic fiction” (124). Likewise, she traces the form and content of Ouida’s epigrams in the epigrammatic writing of Oscar Wilde. She also argues that the kind of writing in *Princess Napraxine*, which describes an “aesthetic dreamscape” with “catalogues of great artifacts,” emphasises “an artificial, hothouse atmosphere” and exhibits “an interest in objects faded or fragile,” was to become central to “the aestheticist mode of writing” (141). Schaffer, then, inserts Ouida into a literary tradition hitherto not associated with her and awards her a significant place in history as more than just a popular novelist.

Schaffer’s argument in *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* is revisited and expanded in an essay published in 2003 titled ‘The Origins of the Aesthetic Novel: Ouida, Wilde, and the Popular Romance.’ In this essay, Schaffer again discusses Ouida’s development of the *fin de siècle* literary

dandy, tracing this figure first in “effete dandy figures” (215) of her early novels and the play *Afternoon*. She then turns her attention to *Princess Napraxine* and *Othmar*, arguing that in these novels Ouida “introduced a new kind of dandy: an utterly self-possessed and cynical connoisseur whose greatest pleasure is the manipulation of others” (220-1) and who also happens to be a woman. This female dandy, Schaffer argues, not only uses the kind of epigrammatic language discussed in *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, but is also “a version of the New Woman more amenable to [Ouida’s] own aesthetic mindset” (221): not a “struggling working woman with short hair and a bicycle” but “a phenomenally wealthy and extraordinarily powerful arbiter of international taste” (221). Again, Schaffer notes the ambiguity in these novels towards the female aesthete and the “traditional angel in the house” (221). Schaffer also again examines the influence of Ouida’s “characters, conventions, dialogue styles, and narratives” (213) on British aestheticism, focusing in particular on Wilde’s debt to her. For example, she argues that in Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* “Dorian is a Ouidean dandy from [Ouida’s] early period frozen in adolescence,” while “Lord Henry is a Ouidean dandy of the late period with his gender changed” (222); she also traces Wilde’s reworking of the Ouidean epigram. Schaffer interprets Wilde as simultaneously wishing to identify with and distance himself from Ouida. Consequently, he attempts to “build

on Ouida's innovations" while "transfer[ring] them to an almost all-male world in which dandyism and epigrammatic dialogue could become viable alternative models of *masculine* identity and behavior" (225). Schaffer's work on Ouida's role in British aestheticism, as reflected both in this essay and *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, is original and rewarding. It forms the basis of the argument presented in Chapter Four, where it is discussed in more detail.

Schaffer published another essay attending to Ouida in 2001, this time centring on the debate between her and Sarah Grand over the New Woman in 1894. While Ouida's depiction of the New Woman as a "demonic" (45) figure has usually been taken as a sign of her conservatism, in "Nothing But Foolscap and Ink": Inventing the New Woman' Schaffer interprets it instead as a strategy that enables her first "to construct herself decorously by contrast," and second "to propose her own political ideas without being branded a radical" (46). Thus by "excoriat[ing] the New Woman" for habits like bad manners, grammatical errors, inappropriate dress, an "insensate love of publicity" and an "unfeminine love of travelling" (46), Ouida displaces onto this figure precisely those qualities for which she herself was condemned. Likewise, by constructing herself, by contrast, as "moderate and reasonable" (45), she clears the way to advance her own radical political projects, including activism on behalf of animals and the

working classes. Indeed, Schaffer points out that in many ways Ouida's perspective resembles that of Sarah Grand and the New Woman. For example, like the New Woman, Ouida critiques "the institution of marriage" and "advocat[es] ... women's sexual natures"; likewise, Schaffer points out, the fact that she was "an unmarried woman who supported herself through writing" and "initiated relationships with men outside of marriage" meant that she could have served as "a role model" (47) for the New Woman.

Like Schaffer's work, the most recent critical essay to address Ouida again takes quite a different route from previous criticism. In a 2005 essay titled 'Ouida's Rhetoric of Empathy: A Case Study in Victorian Anti-Vivisection Narrative,' Mary Sanders Pollock engages with recent interest in the comparatively new field of animal studies, arguing that Ouida's fiction and non-fiction "offer[s] us a lens into both the popular conscience of the late Victorian era and the ethical issues of our own time" (136). According to Pollock, Ouida's ethical system is motivated by "profound sympathy for the marginal and the dispossessed as well as the powerful" and links cruelty towards animals with "disaster for the humans associated with them, in plots suggesting that humans and nonhuman animals are bound up together in one living community." In a manner that is particularly evocative for us today in the wake of current environmental concerns, she argues, Ouida represents this community as fatally threatened by "the mechanistic economic, social,

and intellectual structures of modernity” (137). Pollock also analyses Ouida’s narrative style in the context of the difficulty of representing animal consciousness through human language, an issue that has, she contends, important ethical ramifications. For example, Pollock argues that in her adult dog stories, Ouida uses a “free indirect” narrative style in which a “third person narrator reports, from a point of view quite close to but not identical with” the human and canine characters, “what they may be feeling, actions from which their feelings might be inferred, various kinds of nonverbal communication, or the thoughts that the characters might frame if they expressed themselves in human speech” (244). This strategy ensures that the “ontological equivalence of human and canine is ... constantly reinforced” (144), and in its “attempt to represent animal consciousness without violating the boundaries of what is knowable” it is “obviously an appeal to sophisticated adult readers with the political and economic power to effect change” (149-50). Pollock’s interest in Ouida, which diverges from the primarily feminist interest that has shaped earlier critical interest in her, presents us with another way in which her fiction can yield productive analysis. Certainly, Ouida’s work, both fiction and non-fiction, offers rich potential for animal-studies oriented criticism.

A particularly positive development in Ouida scholarship is the recent republication of *Moths* in 2005 by Broadview, and *In Maremma* in

2006 by Valancourt. Both volumes are edited and introduced by Natalie Schroeder. Schroeder's introduction to *Moths* focuses on the novel's critique of marriage as a form of legalised prostitution. More generally, she describes Ouida's fiction as "romantic novels of fashionable society or 'the high life' which are derived from the 'silver-fork' novels of the 1820s and 1830s" (19) rather than sensation fiction, and argues that her "works focus more on fantasy, romance, and passion from a female, rather than male point of view" (20). Schroeder also discusses Ouida's "somewhat ambivalent attitude" (20) towards high society and sees the character of Lady Dolly as "much more realistic" than Ouida's "earlier villainous adventuresses" (21).

Schroeder's introduction to *In Maremma* follows Schaffer's lead in *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, arguing that in that novel Ouida "significantly revises the Gothic tradition to reflect a fantasy of female empowerment" (x). As Gothic heroine, the novel's protagonist, Musa, rejects a series of "restrictive roles imposed upon women" (xi). Instead, Schroeder argues, she creates "an alternative to an oppressive life of conventional domesticity" in the ancient tombs that she discovers, a sanctuary that the "patriarchy," represented first by "her actual threatening father" and then the aristocrat Este, nonetheless "invades and destroys" (xii). In this way, Ouida is seen to "provid[e] a critique of patriarchal culture's oppressive gender roles that places the novel in the female Gothic tradition" (xiv).

These two reprints of Ouida's novels signal increasing interest in her work, and close this discussion on a promising note. While it is true that the critical body of work attending to her is still small, Schaffer's research in particular locates her in a significant place in literary history. Meanwhile, critics like Pollock, Gilbert, Schroeder and Jordan have gone a long way towards uncovering in Ouida's work many points of interest for literary scholarship. Their scholarship provides an invaluable base for the arguments that I put forward in the chapters to follow.<sup>8</sup>

### **III. OUIDA AND WOMEN'S AUTHORSHIP IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

Comparatively few of the scholars discussed above deal with the question of authorship as it specifically applies to Ouida: that is, how she regarded herself as an author and the ways in which she responded to the cultural climate that determined how she, as a woman writer, was received. As we have seen, Elaine Showalter argues that Ouida, together with other writers of her generation, freely exploits the professional opportunities offered to her and shakes off the restraint that determined the content of earlier women writers' fiction. Jane Jordan, meanwhile, discusses Ouida's self-conscious construction of her identity and notes her "serious underlying engagement ... with her cultural situation as a woman writer" (91); thus she



suggests that in *Folle-Farine* “Ouida’s own anxieties concerning her intellectual legitimacy as a woman writer are perhaps reflected in her heroine’s illegitimacy of birth and her illiteracy” (94-5). Gilbert argues that Ouida sidesteps the coding of popular women writers’ authorship as prostitution by identifying herself as an artist and refusing to associate with commercialism at all. Schaffer’s work is also based on an assumption of Ouida’s artistic seriousness, which is reflected in her aestheticism. Clearly, however, there is a lot more that could be said on this subject.

To place Ouida in the context of nineteenth century women’s authorship is not only to fill in a gap in the criticism pertaining to her, but to begin to fill in a significant gap in nineteenth century scholarship generally. For a start, while the question of nineteenth century women novelists’ authorship has undeniably generated an enormous quantity of critical material, the bulk of this attention is overwhelmingly skewed in favour of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Charlotte (and to a lesser extent Emily) Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell. Of these women, all but Austen are writers from the mid-century, with the youngest, Eliot, completing her last novel in 1876. The dominance that these writers have attained in nineteenth century literary criticism means that while many texts concerned with nineteenth century female authorship announce their scope as “the nineteenth century” or the

“Victorian” period, they fail to consider women writers who belong to the generations that succeeded Eliot.<sup>9</sup>

In the last thirty years, attempts to resuscitate those parts of the literary tradition excised by the exclusion of non-canonical writers have meant that a wider range of women novelists have increasingly been considered in the context of female authorship. Notably, Margaret Oliphant, Harriet Martineau and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna—who each wrote autobiographies—have been the subject of critical notice.<sup>10</sup> The self-conscious desire of New Woman writers such as Sarah Grand and George Egerton to construct a feminine aesthetic has also attracted a significant amount of attention.<sup>11</sup> It is clear from such scholarship that a great deal changed between these generations of women novelists. To begin with, ever since Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argued in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) that male control over representation and the sense of a clash between femininity and authorship led women writers to substitute an “anxiety of authorship” (51) for the Bloomian “anxiety of influence” (48), the bulk of the scholarship on mid-century women’s authorship has been framed around a belief in women writers’ anxiety.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, scholars of the mid-century have emphasised the ways in which women writers attempted to downplay their perceived transgressions by emphasising their femininity,

disavowing professionalism and perpetuating conservative viewpoints in their fiction.<sup>13</sup>

While scholars such as Deborah Epstein Nord, Terri Doughty and Penny Boumelha identify at the end of the century the same kind of clash taking place between femininity and authorship that has been seen to occur during the mid-century, the overwhelming critical consensus is that by the *fin de siècle* women writers' defensiveness had lessened considerably. Overall, these women are regarded as rebellious about the critical attitudes that marginalised them and shown openly to represent in their texts the ways in which they were disadvantaged by their femininity; in many cases, they are also seen to attempt to formulate an explicitly feminine aesthetic.<sup>14</sup> However, despite these indications that a great deal changed for women writers between the middle of the century and the *fin de siècle*, the question of authorship as it applies to the generation of women writers to which Ouida belongs—those writers who were born in around the 1830s and 1840s and began their writing careers around the 1860s or 1870s—remains comparatively neglected.

Aside from Ouida, these writers include Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Anne Thackeray Ritchie and Rhoda Broughton, as well as scores of lesser-known women such as Rosa Nouchette Carey, Florence Marryat, Emma Marshall, Annie Thomas, Christabel Rose Coleridge and Isabella Harwood,

to name but a few.<sup>15</sup> The most significant work on this group of writers remains Elaine Showalter's brief discussion in *A Literature of Their Own* thirty years ago, discussed in the section above. Gilbert's *Disease, Desire and the Body*, which, as I have already touched upon, expands upon Catherine Gallagher's notion of the female author as prostitute, is a rather more recent text that looks at authorship in the context of this generation of women writers. Gilbert's book, which considers Ouida, Braddon and Broughton, is partly a product of the significant interest in the sensation novelists that has been aroused in the years since *A Literature of Their Own* was published. This attention largely follows Showalter in regarding the sensation novelists' fiction as a rejection of the domestic novel (even if they are often seen as ultimately conservative); the implication of this is, of course, that the sensation novelists were less troubled by the anxiety that compelled earlier writers to try to minimise their gender transgressions by writing conservative, domestic novels.

The bulk of more specific critical attention pertaining to the question of authorship has been given to Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and most of that revolves around her attempts to be taken seriously as a writer in the face of her reputation as a popular writer of sensation novels. With a few notable exceptions, these analyses tend to treat gender concerns as less important than the demands of the marketplace that faced all writers.<sup>16</sup> Considerations

of female authorship attending to other writers of this period are scattered and limited. Some interesting work has been carried out on Anne Thackeray Ritchie, who has been regarded as subject to both the demands of her father and a paternalistic publishing industry, which are seen to have hampered her professionalism at the same time that they fostered her talent.<sup>17</sup> Ritchie's attempt to construct a female literary tradition has also been examined.<sup>18</sup> More generally, both Ritchie's and Carey's fiction has been described as far less rebellious than that of the sensation novelists in its adherence (externally at least) to conventional 'feminine' literary forms.<sup>19</sup> Lack of critical attention means that the position of writers like Marryat, Marshall, Coleridge, Harwood and Thomas with respect to female authorship remains unknown. Attending to Ouida will not, of course, remedy the woeful lack of attention given to these writers, who cannot be assumed, for example, to regard authorship with the rebelliousness of the sensation novelists. Nonetheless, to examine Ouida in the context of female authorship in the second half of the nineteenth century is to go some way towards closing the yawning gap in the scholarship that currently exists.

#### IV. OUTLINE OF THESIS

As I have already suggested, there many reasons why Ouida is a rewarding subject for a study of female authorship in the second half of the nineteenth century. Aside from the rebelliousness that obviously contrasts with the attitudes of the older mid-Victorian writers, her intense artistic self-consciousness is especially interesting: notoriously, she compared herself with George Eliot, telling her continental publisher upon Eliot's death that "*You must make much of ME, for now George Elliott [sic] is gone there is no one else who can write English*" (cited in Bigland 156, italics Bigland's). In this, Ouida differs from other popular authors like Braddon and Oliphant, who freely admitted, with greater or lesser degrees of regret, that they did not write truly great fiction. Most importantly, her sensitivity to changes in the literary climate, and her willingness to adapt and innovate in the face of those changes, make her a particularly apt subject for a study of women's authorship. This responsiveness to her cultural situation, and in particular her response to those elements of the literary world that affected her as a woman writer, forms the basis of the rest of my thesis.

The first chapter of this thesis lays the foundation of the argument presented in the remaining chapters by situating Ouida in the context of that model of women's authorship upon which scholars of the nineteenth century

have, for the most part, concentrated. Following the lead of Showalter and others, I argue that women writers at the mid-century minimised the gender transgressions associated with their authorship by adopting the genre of the domestic novel and, in so doing, working to uphold middle-class gender boundaries. While I do not classify Ouida as a sensation novelist, I see her, together with the sensation novelists, as participating in a broader impulse in the 1860s to destabilise the gendered boundaries around which the domestic novel was structured. Focusing on Ouida's 1865 novel *Strathmore*, I argue that this novel subverts the domestic heroine of the domestic novel. Like the character of Lady Audley in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, the villainess heroine of *Strathmore*, Lady Vavasour, exposes the performative nature of the domestic angel in the house. However, Ouida's critique of the middle-class gender ideology that delimited women writers is more penetrating and subtle than that of Braddon. Specifically, *Strathmore* collapses the binary oppositions around which nineteenth century gender was constructed, exposing men's unwillingness to see their own affinity with women like Lady Vavasour and their readiness to believe flattering, but false, gendered stereotypes. It is not only the blindness of men to these stereotypes that is exposed, however: Ouida uses the character of the novel's other heroine, Lucille—a seemingly idealised domestic angel—to position

the reader as the dupe of the kinds of stereotypes deployed by the domestic novel.

In Chapter Two, I turn my attention to Ouida's 1869 novel *Tricotrin*, which is situated at a period in literary history when, as a result of the sensation novel phenomenon, middle-class readers were forced to recognise that they belonged to a reading audience that included the working classes. This recognition propelled the high art novel's incipient split from the popular novel, a split that, I argue, was crucially informed by the ideology of what sociologists term occupational professionalism, which became linked with the high culture author. Furthermore, since occupational professionalism was gendered as masculine, its association with the high culture novel worked to exclude women such as Ouida from its ranks. While the pairing of male and female artist figures in *Tricotrin* may at first appear to reproduce this opposition between a masculinised high art and feminised popular art, the novel in fact challenges the distinction between literary professionalism and popularity that threatened to exclude her from the ranks of the serious novel. In addition to critiquing the cultural climate that excludes women from the highest reaches of art, in *Tricotrin* Ouida creates a model of high art that includes feminine qualities and can be undertaken by women.



Chapter Three discusses another of Ouida's texts that is positioned at a pivotal moment in literary history: her autobiographical novel *Friendship*. Published in 1878, *Friendship* was situated at a moment when the shift from mid-Victorian realism to the more formally oriented, aesthetically self-conscious novels of the late century was just beginning to register. Because Ouida had suffered from a critical climate dominated by realist mores that, like the literary professionalism I discuss in Chapter Two, were gendered in a way that excluded women, she seized the opportunity both to critique the gendered lines of mid-Victorian realism and to formulate her own, feminine literary aesthetic. Denouncing mid-Victorian realism as middle-class, mundane and aesthetically dishonest and exposing the gendered politics of the realist gaze, she attributes to herself a transcendent literary aesthetic that utilises feminine qualities and attempts to bypass the exploitative gaze of realism.

My last chapter examines Ouida's 1884 novel, *Princess Napraxine*, building on the important work that Talia Schaffer has carried out in recuperating Ouida's position in the context of British aestheticism. *Princess Napraxine*'s deployment of late nineteenth century aestheticism is a significant departure from her earlier fiction, and the novel is arguably the first British novel seriously to incorporate aestheticism. I contend that *Princess Napraxine* writes back against male aesthetes' use of women to

obscure their participation in consumer culture. Concomitantly, I see Ouida's frank portrayal of aestheticism's link with consumer culture as a sign of her willingness to admit her own implication in the marketplace, even if that confidence is ultimately undermined by the novel's ambivalence about consumer culture.

I have chosen these four texts because each one is located at a revealing and important moment of the history of the nineteenth century novel. They illuminate in turn the impact of sensation fiction and its aftermath, the demise of mid-Victorian realism and the influence of late-century aestheticism on the nineteenth century novel and, in particular, on the nineteenth century woman writer who wished to be recognised as a serious artist. While it is true that Ouida continued writing fiction throughout the 1890s and into the early twentieth-century, the more sophisticated earlier texts lend themselves far more readily to the kind of examination in which I am interested in this thesis. Others share this view: as I have already mentioned, Schaffer contends that by the 1890s Ouida "ran out of ideas" and resorted to "increasingly bitter critiques of aristocratic immorality" and "the rise of a spectacle-oriented, commodified society" (150). It does seem likely that the less substantial short stories that were a feature of her later writing were the inevitable result of her desperate need to alleviate her financial situation, which consequently blunted the attentive response to the changing

literary climate that characterised her earlier work. However, as I hope to show, there is much fertile territory to be explored in the novels Ouida published during the years that she published her best work. With that in mind, then, I turn now to the first of my main chapters.

### **Chapter 1: Beginnings. *Strathmore*, gender and authorship.**

Women writers have, historically, tended to be treated harshly for especially aggressive promotion of their artistic talents. Until the middle of the twentieth century, it was commonplace to dismiss Ouida's self-conscious construction of herself as an artist as pretentious blather. In his 1960 study of the English novel, for example, Lionel Stevenson regarded her merely as "[d]evoid of beauty and social status, but endowed with enormous egoism and ambition" (356), while Malcolm Elwin, in his acerbic chapter on her in 1934, claimed that, "[f]rom the publication of her first story till the day of her death, she conceived herself to be an inspired genius, and persisted for so many years in the confident assumption, that others, in spite of themselves, began to take her at her own valuation" (291). Happily, the feminist recuperation of popular Victorian women writers that has taken place from around the 1970s has made it possible to scrutinise Ouida's self-promotion as a phenomenon deserving of more than casual condescension. The lens through which I examine it in this chapter is as a symptom of a new and rebellious mood amongst women writers towards contemporary ideas about female authorship in the 1860s. At the mid-century, authorship was gendered in a way that both neutralised the problematic nature of women writers and put them at a disadvantage professionally and artistically. This model of

authorship was, for the most part, upheld by the domestic novelists, and the domestic novel itself was a crucial site in the construction and reconstruction of the middle-class gender ideology upon which it was based. Ouida, however, belonged to a new generation of women writers who challenged this mode of gendered authorship and, as a consequence, the construction of middle-class gender as it was staged in the domestic novel. In this chapter, I show how Ouida's 1865 novel *Strathmore* destabilises the categories of gender staged in the domestic novel with the hope of forging a new, more enabling authorial identity.

As I have just suggested, the nineteenth century domestic novel was a crucial site in the construction and reproduction of middle-class gender ideology. While it cannot be denied that novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot and Charlotte Brontë offered sophisticated and critical interpretations of domestic ideology, more conventional—and, arguably, much more typical—domestic novels, such as those by Anne Marsh, Dinah Mulock Craik, Charlotte Yonge and Charles Dickens, dominated the literary marketplace.<sup>20</sup> The middle-class gender ideology staged by these novels was structured around a number of binary oppositions.

The idea that language, and consequently our understanding of the world, is constructed around a series of binary oppositions was first theorised by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and later adopted by theorists like

Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes.<sup>21</sup> As Derrida in particular recognises, these binary oppositions are never equally paired, but rather occupy a “violent hierarchy” in which “[o]ne of the two terms governs the other ... or has the upper hand” (39). (Derrida, for example, is particularly interested in the way in which speech is privileged over writing in Western philosophy.)

The binary oppositions that underpinned Victorian middle-class gender ideology, and consequently found their way into domestic novels, radiated from the familiar idea of separate spheres, or imagined self-contained zones in which men and women respectively held dominion. Classic texts of middle-class gender ideology, like Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* (1864) and Coventry Patmore’s *The Angel in the House* (1863), consequently tend to be concerned with clearly rendering a binary opposition of gender difference. Ruskin, for example, argues that:

The man’s power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. But the woman’s power is for rule, not for battle,—and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places. Her great function is Praise: she enters into no contest, but infallibly adjudges the crown of contest. By her office, and place, she is protected from all danger and temptation. The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial:—to him, therefore, the failure, the offence, the inevitable error: often he must be wounded, or subdued, often misled, and *always* hardened. (73)

Ruskin here usefully summarises the binary oppositions of gender constructed by middle-class gender ideology. Men are represented as active (the man is “the doer”) while women are passive (“she enters into no contest”). Men engage in activities that demand recognition in the wider world, such as “conquest,” discovery and creation; women’s duties, by contrast, are at the service of others: “Her great function is Praise.” Similarly, men are worldly, while women, “protected from all danger and temptation,” are delicate and morally pure. This last aspect is particularly important, because one of women’s primary duties in the home was believed to be the maintenance of the nation’s moral health.<sup>22</sup> Ruskin also sets up an opposition between women’s minds and masculine intellectual power: in contrast with that of women, men’s intellect is “for invention or creation.” Although not specified here, the masculine mind in fact functioned as the basis of several binary oppositions: masculine rationality or intellectual strength could variously be opposed to feminine emotionality, intuition, capriciousness or irrationality. Likewise, masculine worldliness or intellectual capacity were contrasted with feminine simplicity or even childishness, qualities that, together with feminine intuition and innocence, create the sense of naturalness associated with the idealised middle-class woman.<sup>23</sup>

Middle-class gender ideology had an enormously important role in the construction of middle-class social power. This has been recognised by a

number of influential nineteenth century scholars, including Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong. In *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Poovey begins from the premise that the “representation of biological sexuality, the definition of sexual difference, and the social organization of sexual relations are social, not natural, phenomena” (2) and argues that the Victorian construction of gender that segregated women from the public sphere was central to a broad range of ideological work. In particular, the ideal of separate spheres produced and consolidated middle-class social power by “preserv[ing] virtue without inhibiting productivity” and “linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self-interest and competition integral to economic success,” as well as “set[ting] limits to the groups that actually had access to liberalism’s promise of universal economic opportunities” (10). According to Poovey, this conceptualisation of gender was subsequently reflected in a wide range of middle-class projects, including the construction of professionalisation in the fields of medicine and authorship and the legitimisation of Britain’s colonial power.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong also argues that strictly demarcated binary oppositions of gender were central to middle-class social power. Specifically, Armstrong claims that gender differences became an ideologically useful way to mask



political struggle. By creating the fiction that the domestic sphere was apolitical, she argues, “writing about the domestic woman” (8) in conduct books and later the novel enabled the middle-class to visualise itself as a community, to contest the power of the aristocracy, and finally to exclude the working classes from social power. For example, by using the domestic woman to represent value beyond that which is simply monetary, the middle-classes acquired social power against the aristocracy and their fixed status positions; because the staging of this value was in the domestic sphere, it seemed apolitical.<sup>24</sup>

As an important site in the maintenance of these ideologically important binary oppositions of gender, domestic novels worked carefully to preserve ‘natural’ boundaries between masculinity and femininity. In these novels, good husbands and fathers labour in the outside world while their wives, mothers and daughters provide them with sanctuaries in the home. The narrator in Mulock Craik’s popular novel *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), for instance, describes how when the novel’s hero “came home jaded and worn, sickened to the soul by the hard battle he had to fight daily, hourly, with the outside world,” his daughter “Muriel would come softly and creep into his bosom, and he was comforted” (258). In keeping with the dominant ideology, domestic heroines derive their charms from qualities like purity, naturalness, and simplicity. Fanny in Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of*

*the Family* (1865), for example, is distinguished by “innocent, soft, helpless dignity” (181), a phrase that invokes simplicity, passivity, childishness and purity. Likewise, in Yonge’s popular novel *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Guy, the novel’s hero, compares his aunt’s “softness and motherly affection, coupled with the touch of *naïveté* that gave” her “freshness and loveableness,” with his cousin Margaret’s “decided, self-reliant air” (163), a quality that becomes her brother Richard “well enough, but which did not sit as appropriately on a woman” (163-4). Yonge’s message here is clear: simplicity and innocence are loveable in a woman; self-assertion and independence are not. Another quality treated approvingly by domestic novelists is womanly submission to masculine will, as illustrated by Fanny’s “habit of passive submission” (95), or, in *John Halifax*, Ursula’s recognition that “a wife is bound to the very last to obey in all things, not absolutely wrong, her husband’s will” (286). With some notable exceptions, domestic novelists also subscribe to the notion that the intellectual domain is, by and large, a masculine one. This is implicit in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, in which the white and “very bony fingers” of Guy’s cousin Charles are compared with his sister “Amy’s round, plump, childish hand, and ‘soft pinky cushions ... not meant for studying anatomy upon’” (9). Like Ruskin and Patmore, these domestic novelists idealise—indeed, transcendentalise—their heroines. Thus Marsh, who repeatedly aligns the eponymous heroine of *Emilia Wyndham* (1846) with angels, argues that a

man who falls into the care of a bad woman (in this case, Mr. Danby's stingy and misanthropic mother) "has no sense of moral beauty ... none of the divine influence of gentle tenderness, none of the high adoration of what appear to him angelic virtues—none of all this has flowed into his soul—the very fountain from which the finer feelings and the higher tendencies are to be drawn has been changed and petrified at its source" (165). Such exalted terms left readers in no doubt about how they were supposed to regard women who conform to middle-class gender ideology.

Women in domestic novels who are forced by external circumstances to step outside their proper sphere do so with trepidation and regret. In Craik's *Mistress and Maid*, Hilary, whose poverty obliges her to accept a job managing a shop, worries about what her lover Mr. Lyon will think of her:

What if he should think it too public, too unfeminine? he had such a horror of a woman's being anything but a woman, as strong and brave as she could, but in a womanly way; doing anything, however painful, that she was obliged to do, but nothing out of whim or bravado, or the excitement of stepping out of her sphere into man's. Would Robert Lyon think less of her, Hilary, because she had to learn to take care of herself, to protect herself, and to act in so many ways for herself, contrary to the natural and right order of things? That old order—God forbid it should ever change!—which ordained that women should be 'keepers at home.' (153).

Hilary's assay into the public sphere of work is, she is keenly aware, a violation of what is "natural," and she is forced into it by circumstances beyond her control: in this case, the failure of her nephew to behave as a

responsible breadwinner and take care of his aunts. While Hilary is treated sympathetically by Craik, however, women and men who deliberately transgress gender boundaries are unequivocally condemned by domestic novelists. Rachel, the “clever woman” of Yonge’s *The Clever Woman of the Family*, is pointedly punished for her usurpation of masculine fields of knowledge—medicine, business, the law—by being made indirectly responsible for the deaths of two girls. Anthony Trollope’s Mrs Proudie in *Barchester Towers*, who takes over her husband’s curatorial responsibilities, is, likewise, an obviously unattractive character. On the men’s side, Mr Wyndham in *Emilia Wyndham* brings ruin to his family in part by meddling extravagantly in household decoration and utterly failing to listen to his wife’s advice about the household affairs.

The model of gender inscribed in these novels extended—most crucially in the case of ambitious female writers like Ouida—to authorship itself. Women writers fundamentally threatened the stability of middle-class gender boundaries. By publishing and seeking an audience for her books, a woman writer engaged in a public act that was at odds with the gendered division of private and public work. In an 1842 text appropriately titled *Female Writers: Thoughts on Their Proper Sphere, and on Their Powers of Usefulness*, M. A. Stodart voiced the dominant view on the issue when she declared, “Publicity can, to woman, never be a native element” (cited in

Showalter 82). As another writer argued in 1864 in the *London Review*, while “Knowledge of life, with all its lights and shadows for a man, is part and a bitter part of his career,” for women it causes immeasurable loss: it is “the fruit from off a deadly tree, the taste of which opens to her the wide world, but closes to her the gates of the enchanted gardens of Paradise” (‘Literary Women’ 328). Because it was an act of “power, self-assertion, [and] active shaping rather than passive acceptance” (Helsing et al 9) that “required an engagement with feeling and a cultivation of the ego rather than its negation” (Showalter 22), authorship was also incompatible with the passivity or self-negation demanded of women. In other words, writing and publishing was an undertaking that depended upon qualities generally associated with middle-class masculinity.

Women writers’ failure to adhere to gender boundaries was highly unsettling. According to Judith Butler, gender is performative—a series of acts that produce a sense of naturalness, even though there is nothing natural about them. This “false stabilization of gender” (172) is, moreover, constantly under threat of being exposed as such by the “gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender” (172-3). Women writers were dangerous, then, because by assuming a role that was

associated with masculine rather than feminine qualities they threatened to show up the performativity of middle-class gender, the ideological importance of which I have already explained. As a consequence, they were regarded with suspicion, an attitude that was summed up in 1852 by George Henry Lewes when he stated that “[t]he appearance of Woman in the field of literature” is “so unfeminine, so contrary to the real destination of woman” (‘Lady Novelists’ 39). Indeed, the *London Review* claimed that authorship could only be attained “by undergoing a defeminizing process” (‘Literary Women’ 328), and went on to suggest that

If women were wise they would understand that they have a mission quite as grand as that of literary authorship. It is the mission of keeping alive for men certain ideas, and ideals too, which would soon pass out of the world if they were not fed and replenished by those who are able to stand aloof from the worry and vexations of active life. (329)

The writer for the *London Review* clearly attempts here to maintain authorship as a masculine preserve and to reinstate women back within the domestic sphere and a properly feminine mission.

The *London Review*’s solution, of course, had little hope of success; women writers had long been firmly installed within the literary marketplace. A more realistic solution to the problem of female authorship was to try to fit it within conventional gender boundaries, a project with which both the domestic novelists, who were threatened with being labelled

unfeminine, and Victorian society generally, readily conspired. In this scheme, authorship became staged within the model of binary oppositions of gender of which the domestic novel was an important source. Consequently, women writers properly treated their writing as, in Nicola Diane Thompson's words, "an extension of the domestic 'angel in the hearth' role" (89) through which women maintained the nation's moral health.<sup>25</sup> In keeping with this, they were expected to write didactic novels, always with impeccable morality, that upheld domestic ideology. As Lyn Pykett argues, the "moral, didactic" novel was the "dominant for[m]" of the "separate feminine sphere to which, from the eighteenth century onwards, novels by or for women were usually assigned." Such fiction was considered appropriate for women because it was "associated with, indeed supposedly derived from," their "affective nature and familial role" (25). This meant that women writers were subject to rigorous policing on the part of Victorian reviewers, who reacted vehemently to any hint of immorality or 'coarseness.' The latter quality could apply, as Showalter notes, to everything from "the 'damn' in *Jane Eyre*" (25) to Yonge's reference in *Heartsease* to the heart as "a machine for pumping blood" (cited in Showalter 26)—a phrase that her editor, John Keble, forced her to alter (Showalter 26).

At the same time that women writers were expected to have an explicitly moral purpose, their choice of content was supposed to reflect their

adherence to conventional femininity. Women writers, it was argued, should confine the content of their novels to their own narrow sphere of life; as a consequence, the domestic novel was the preferred choice of fiction for women, and attempts by women writers to represent aspects of life or character that were considered to be beyond the range of domestic life were almost inevitably seen as failures. As a writer for the *Gentleman's Magazine* declared in 1853, women “cannot, indeed, fetch up materials from the haunts into which a Dickens or Bulwer may penetrate. They may in vain try to grapple with the more complicated difficulties of many a *man's* position and career” (‘Lady Novelists’ 19). Likewise, Jane Austen, who was regarded by many as the epitome of feminine authorship, especially elicited praise for restricting herself to what Lewes described as her “perfect orb” (‘Lady Novelists’ 148), words that praise as they simultaneously invoke the restriction of her world.

The expectation that women writers should stick to their proper sphere meant that, as Pykett argues, “the prevailing or preferred mode of the proper feminine was realistic,” since realism—or, more specifically, domestic realism—“supposedly reflected or acted as the vehicle for [women writers’] limited experience, and their particular limited powers” (25). Domestic realism was considered to be particularly suited for women writers, who, restricted to the domestic sphere, were believed to be adept at



observing small details, while lacking masculine originality or the ability to grasp the world in its entirety. In a review of *The Mill on the Floss* for the *Saturday Review* in 1860, for instance, one critic sees “minuteness of painting” (114) as characteristic of both Eliot and Austen. Six years later, the young Henry James linked femininity with “microscopic observation,” which he contrasted with the “great synthetic guesses with which a real”—and male—“master attacks the truth” (rev. *Felix Holt* 277).

This belief that women writers were naturally suited to close observation is repeated in an 1860 article for the *London Review*, in which it is argued that

The most successful female novelists are those who have drawn upon the topics that lay closest at hand, and submitted them to the investigation of the microscope. There is no generalization, or reasoning, of a practical kind in these works, but they contain an abundance of quiet and vivid surface observation, acute guesses at profounder things, and heaps of conventional commonplaces which men generally overlook, or are incapable of appreciating. (Cited in Helsinger et al 53)

Here the reviewer opposes women’s detailism to the familiar ‘masculine’ capacity for intellectual reason or rationality. The implication is that women lack the masculine intellect to enable them to go beyond simple observation into true profundity or originality. A similar view was expressed by R. H. Hutton in an article about Mulock Craik’s fiction for the *North British Review* in 1856. Hutton argues that, “You can always see a kind of

intellectual framework, of some sort, in a man's novels, which tells you that the unity is given rather by the mind and conception of the narrator, than by the actual evolution of the story." By contrast, he claims, "Feminine novelists never carry you beyond the tale they are telling; they are a great deal too much interested in it" (468). Conventional gender ideology is again at work here: women writers lack the intellectual depth to explore "beyond the tale they are telling"; their stories progress by a natural or intuitive progression of the plot rather than being structured by a "unity" deliberately imposed "by the mind." It is this recognition that women's minds work through intuition rather than intellectual effort that leads critics like Lewes to praise the "ease and naturalness" ('Word' 175) of the "evolution" of women's plots (in this case Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*).

The gendering of women's writing could be invoked in other ways. While male writing was characterised by power and vigour, women writers were praised for qualities like 'fineness' or 'delicacy.' In 1862, for example, Julia Kavanagh argued that the "three redeeming qualities, which have frequently betrayed anonymous female writers," are "Delicacy, Tenderness, and Sympathy" (176). A review of Marsh's *Evelyn Marston* in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1856 similarly praises her "polish of language, and tenderness of sentiment" (503). More negatively, women's lack of masculine

vigour could manifest itself in the “weakness and vagueness” that Kavanagh also found women’s writing often to “characterize” (176).

Conventional gender boundaries also structured the way in which women writers and their peers represented their professional lives. As Valerie Sanders says, women writers “reassured their audiences that they had not been hardened or unsexed by a literary career ... by devoting relatively little” of their autobiographies “to an account of their literary activities” (*Private Lives* 82). Oliphant’s *Autobiography*, an excellent source for an illustration of the conflicted and defensive position of women writers, is a case in point. Throughout the autobiography, Oliphant’s writing career is almost an afterthought, the details of which she persistently claims not to recall or care much about. Of her second novel, *Caleb Field*, she writes, “I don’t think it attracted much notice, but I don’t remember. Other matters, events even in our uneventful life, took so much more importance in life than these books” (30). In another telling passage, she wonders “if God were to try me with the loss of this gift, such as it is, whether I should feel it much?” and concludes, “If I could live otherwise I do not think I should. If I could move about the house, and serve my children with my own hands, I know I should be happier” (11). Her authorship, Oliphant is eager to assert, is not the product of ‘masculine’ ambition; nor does it detract from her ‘real’ feminine duties. Moreover, Oliphant shrugs off professionalism by implying that she

does not take her writing seriously as art. As Sanders puts it, she “dismisses as fundamentally alien” a “self-regarding preoccupation with technique” and suggests that “only male authors (such as Trollope and Symonds) take their own creations so seriously” (*Private Lives* 90).<sup>26</sup>

In addition to understating their professional lives, women writers tended to downplay their personal agency in their writing careers. In her 1857 journal entry titled ‘How I Came to Write Fiction,’ George Eliot describes how “It had always been a vague dream of mine that some time or other I might write a novel” (406). Impelled only to write a descriptive opening chapter, she relays the story of how, while staying in Berlin, “something led me to read it to George [Lewes],” to whom “it suggested ... the possibility of my being able to write a novel .... He began to say very positively, ‘You must try and write a story,’ and when we were at Tenby he urged me to being at once” (407). As Sanders notes, Eliot describes the origin of ‘Amos Barton’ as “something casual and accidental” which spurs Lewes to “tak[e] over direction of her literary career: all the active urging is his, all the passive daydreaming hers” (*Private Lives* 98). A similar desire to downplay personal agency is evident in Oliphant’s *Autobiography*, in which she emphasises the unfortunate circumstances that forced her to begin writing. Other women writers used what Linda Pannill calls the “tradition of the woman artist as sibyl,” in which the woman artist is seen as “the

apparently passive agent for a transcendent power,” a conceptualisation that is “less threatening than the idea of an autonomous woman” (26). Sanders in particular notes how in “a significant number of Victorian women’s autobiographies .... the writer ... feels isolated, or somehow different from those around her, but is unable to do anything to help herself. She waits, like Bunyan ... in a state of active passivity, to be ‘called’ by a force outside herself” (*Private Lives* 81).<sup>27</sup>

As Sanders’s reference to Bunyan suggests, many women conceptualised this call as a divine one. The Evangelical novelist Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, who represented herself in her autobiography as a “quiet woman whom ‘it had pleased God to bring ... before the world’” (Peterson *Traditions* 44), is one such writer. According to Mary Jean Corbett, religious women writers like Tonna and Mary Sewell “represent their literary work as a component of their domestic calling as mothers, daughters, and children of God” (74); that is, as part of their feminine sphere of influence. Indeed, Corbett believes that for such women, “it is imperative ... not to be (or not to feel themselves to be) extraordinary or exceptional women” (73). This representation of authorship as “divinely sanctioned female labor” (Peterson *Traditions* 51) clearly comes into alignment with, and derives ammunition from, the transcendence of the idealised domestic angel as she is hymned by writers like Ruskin and Patmore.<sup>28</sup>

It would be a mistake to suggest that Ouida—or indeed, her contemporaries—was not sensitive to the pressure to conform to the kinds of gendering I have been discussing. There is evidence that, like the domestic novelists before her, Ouida attempted to minimise her transgression of gender boundaries by downplaying her agency in writing. Although she rarely made personal information available to the public, an exception is her 1878 novel *Friendship* (which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Three). *Friendship*, which Ouida labelled her *roman à clef* and declared in a letter to Claud Harding was as “TRUE as solemnly as I can declare it” (cited in Lee 94), was based on her romance with the Marchese Lotteringhe della Stufa and her conflict with his lover, Mrs Ross.<sup>29</sup> In this novel, Ouida depicts the early artistic life of her fictional counterpart, Etoile, as a time of private delight in art and study. It is her teacher who insists, against Etoile’s will, that she take her artistic pursuits into the public sphere, thus instigating her professional career as an artist:

‘It is time they [the public] should know the truth,’ said David Istrion, and told it. Etoile regretted that it should be told: to the pure ambitions of the true artist creation is paradise, but the praise of the crowd seems profanity.

But David Istrion had not had his own way unresisted for two thirds of a century to consider such a trifle as any one’s personal desires. (28)

Since *Friendship* is explicitly supposed to be a representation of Ouida’s own life, Etoile’s lack of agency in the commencement of her artistic career

can be read as an attempt to downplay Ouida's own agency in her authorship. More broadly, apparent conservatism about traditional gender boundaries is evident in Ouida's resistance to contemporary campaigns to expand women's rights politically and legally, a stance that is most famously represented by her article 'Female Suffrage' (1886), in which she argues that the "influence on the world" of female suffrage "will scarcely be other than most injurious to its prosperity and most degrading to its wisdom" (290), and her later piece criticising 'The New Woman' (1894).

Despite this apparent conformity, the model of authorship performed by the domestic novelists and praised by the critical press was not one with which Ouida was satisfied. In this, she belongs to a new generation of women writers who began writing during the 1860s and who challenged the gendering of authorship that I have outlined.<sup>30</sup> Impelled by a desire fully to exploit their occupations as novelists and maximise profits and success, these women, who were linked with but not confined to the sensation fiction movement, endeavoured to take control of their professional lives. As I noted in the Introduction, this shift is described by Elaine Showalter, who in *A Literature of Their Own* discusses the new confidence with which women writers of the 1860s, including Ouida, embraced their professional lives. In particular, Showalter argues that during the 1860s "women made an effort to break down the male monopoly of publishing" (154), which meant that

[a]s soon as they began to make money, the sensation novelists invested it in their own careers, publishing and editing magazines and retaining book copyrights. Mrs. Wood edited the *Argosy*, Braddon edited *Belgravia*, Charlotte Riddell edited *St. James Magazine*, and Florence Marryat edited *London Society*. (156)

As we might expect, this new confidence and forthrightness in managing their writing careers is reflected in the comparative absence in these authors of the dismissive or self-effacing attitudes towards their authorship evident in even the most serious of the domestic novelists.

While I disagree with Showalter's categorisation of Ouida as a sensation novelist—as Gilbert points out (*Disease* 88), Ouida's novels lacked the domestic middle-class settings that were central to sensation fiction—she is right to position her amongst the women sensation writers by virtue of their shared perspective on authorship.<sup>31</sup> Like the other sensation novelists, Ouida no longer puts forward the kinds of self-effacing attitudes towards authorship associated with earlier novelists. Although her personal situation—she, her mother and her grandmother were abandoned by her father—certainly made it easy for her to attribute the assumption of her writing career to desperate circumstances, and thus downplay the possibility of 'unfeminine' agency, she never appears to have done so. Unlike the domestic novelists, Ouida also refused to represent herself as domestically inclined. The artist upon whom she modelled herself was, as I discuss further in the following chapter, the cross-dressing, adulterous George Sand.



Moreover, she never, either in *Friendship* or elsewhere, downplays the quality of her writing or suggests that she does not take it seriously. For writers like Ouida, authorship was a serious business and deserved to be treated as such.

Showalter points out in *A Literature of Their Own* that the new women writers of the 1860s also refused to be confined to the domestic didactic realism expected of middle-class women writers. This makes sense, of course—these women could hardly exploit the literary marketplace fully if their content would have to be sharply delimited. The consequence is that sensation novels in particular are shaped by protest against the strictures of ‘feminine’ novelistic content. Citing an 1862 article by Robert Buchanan in *Temple Bar*, Pykett argues that the sensation novel was, on a stylistic level,

seen as a ‘reaction against realism’ ... in its mixing of ‘the incredible’ and the documentary, its refusal to stay within the proper sphere of acceptable character types in domestic settings, and its habit of transporting ‘lurid people’ from ‘the universal gaze’ of ‘our courts of law, and the communicative columns of the daily papers’ to ‘our domestic hearths.’ (34)

By rejecting realism, the sensation novelists therefore rejected the notion that women writers should confine themselves only to those genres considered appropriate for showcasing their limited experience.<sup>32</sup> Ouida also refused to confine herself to the domestic middle-class content that would have been considered suitable for a woman of her social class. Her early fiction not

only uses a resolutely aristocratic (rather than bourgeois domestic) setting, but, as I noted in the Introduction, confidently enters into masculine life. She describes men hunting, talking about women, and engaging in military life, and was reported to have declared that, “*Je n’écris pas pour les femmes. J’écris pour les militaires*” (cited in Bigland 46; italics Bigland’s).

In rejecting the model of the feminine author epitomised by the domestic novelists, these writers rejected, to some degree at least, the gender ideology upon which it was based. Ouida had additional reason to distrust this model: the force with which she believed in her artistic merit and demanded to be taken seriously as an artist, an aesthetic intensity that for the most part (George Eliot being a notable exception) far outstripped any of her female contemporaries in the 1860s. It is, of course, not difficult to see how the gendering of authorship disadvantaged women writers. Women authors’ downplaying of their agency in and passion about their writing careers had the consequence not only of preventing them from exploiting the professional possibilities of writing, but of making them seem less serious about their writing as an art. This trivialisation of the artistic value of women’s writing was assisted by the feminisation of their writing itself. Diminutive words like ‘finesse’ and ‘delicacy’ plainly falter in the face of the powerful, masculine terms used to describe the genius that claims heritage with the great artists of European culture. Believing Charlotte

Brontë to be a man, for example, an anonymous reviewer for the *Era* praised her “vigour” and “power” and compared her writing with “the Cartoons of Raphael”: “The figures are not elaborately executed, but true, bold, well-defined, and full of life” (79). The terms of praise here are associated with masculinity, not femininity (indeed, feminine detailism—the figures that are “elaborately executed”—is clearly devalued). Women’s place in a second order of genius was, in fact, openly acknowledged. In the 1860 *London Review* article cited above, the author states that, “The female novelist who keeps strictly to the region within which she acquires her knowledge may never produce a fiction of the highest order, but she will be in the right path to produce the best fiction of the class in which she is most likely to excel” (cited in Helsinger et al 53). Thus at the same time that women writers were chastised for trying to go beyond their proper sphere, the sphere in which they were confined was relegated to a second order. The criticism of Austen is a particularly good example of this: while Austen’s confinement of her novels to the domestic sphere often saw her cited as a paragon of feminine writing, it simultaneously relegated her to a second order of genius. As Lewes put it in his well-known 1859 article, Austen’s “genius ... is excessively rare; but it is not the highest kind” (‘Novels’ 154): her “two-inch bit of ivory is worth a gallery of canvass by eminent R.A.’s, but it is only a bit of ivory after all” (155). Even George Eliot, according to the *Saturday*

*Review*, is distinguished from men “gifted with great creative power” such as “Shakespeare, and Scott, and Goethe” by her inability to go beyond “bounds which have been probably assigned by the actual experience of life” (rev. *Romola* 209). The latter part of this passage, of course, clearly evokes the artistic limitations that issue from women’s limited province.

In defiance of these attempts to place limits on female authorial ambitions, Ouida’s seriousness about her artistic project, and her refusal to disguise that seriousness, is evident in her correspondence with her continental publisher, Freiherr von Tauchnitz. In 1865, for example, Ouida described how *Strathmore* had been “most triumphant” in America and declared that her next novel, *Chandos*, “is considered the most brilliant of my books” (cited in Bigland 34). Five years later, she informed Tauchnitz that, “My reputation has very greatly increased since *Idalia* appeared” (cited in Bigland 65), while the publication of *Ariadne* in 1877 led her to note that that novel “has a great success everywhere, and commands the homage of great artists who, after all, are the only people that can *really* understand it” (cited in Bigland 112). As I have already mentioned in the Introduction, in 1880, Ouida was inspired by the death of George Eliot to market herself to her Continental publisher as the only writer left in Britain capable of continuing Eliot’s artistic legacy. Ouida’s representation of herself in her autobiographical novel *Friendship*, in which she describes herself as a

“genius” (10) and a “great ... artist” (19), is a notorious further example of the conviction in her artistic greatness that earned her the kinds of negative criticism outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

In rejecting the conventional gendering of authorship, Ouida and her contemporaries rejected the domestic novel and its role in maintaining middle-class gender ideology. It is no coincidence that the radical conception of authorship conceptualised by the women writers contiguous with the sensation movement suddenly coincided with an equally radical subversion in the texts of these authors of the domestic ideology depicted in domestic novels. Victorian critics were keenly aware that middle-class gender boundaries were at stake in sensation fiction’s subversion of the domestic novel. An 1864 *Christian Remembrancer* article titled ‘Our Female Sensation Novelists’ is typical of contemporary responses. As the name of the article suggests, the author, like most Victorian reviewers, regards sensation fiction as a specifically female problem. He or she longs for the days when the domestic novel reigned and “the charge again at young ladies was a morbid love of sermons” (105-6) and, furthermore, “it was interesting and an attraction, at least to seem to live in ignorance of evil” and “good taste to shrink from publicity” (106). Sensation novels, the reviewer argues, are dangerous because they “open out a picture of life free from all the perhaps irksome checks that confine ... existence,” presenting an attractive

heroine who unlike “the thoroughly trained and tried woman” has “never known restraint or has cast it aside” (108). Although this reviewer intriguingly suggests the unnaturalness of the conventional domestic woman who must be “thoroughly trained and tried” and who perhaps only seems “to live in ignorance of evil,” outright rejection of the allegedly unnatural woman portrayed in sensation fiction was much more commonplace in contemporary reviews. In an 1865 article for the *North British Review*, W. Fraser Rae states bluntly that in *Lady Audley’s Secret* Braddon “may have intended to portray a female Mephistopheles; but, if so, she should have known that a woman cannot fill such a part”: her representation “is very exciting; but it is also very unnatural” (584). The *Times*, similarly, criticised “sensational writers” (Editorial 120) for giving readers “all sorts of false ideas about the world in which they live” (121), while in 1865 the *Christian Observer* claimed that the writers of “sensational literature” have “done no little injury by multiplying unnatural, and morbid, and altogether one-sided views of society, overlooking for the most part the homely and the virtuous” (‘B.’ 135). The “homely” and “virtuous” (and natural) referred to here is of course evocative of the “homely” domestic sphere in which the “virtuous” woman supposedly resided, and which was the subject of the domestic novel.

On its simplest level, the sensation novel achieved its effect by first borrowing the middle-class setting of the domestic novel and then unsettling

it with crime and unhappiness. The best-known example is Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which a beautiful heroine who appears to embody every novelistic convention of the domestic novel's angel in the house is really a bigamist, arsonist and would-be murderer. Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*, another wildly popular sensation novel, features a blissfully married couple, the wife of which is secretly simultaneously married to her father's groom, while Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* tells the story of a happy domestic home that also houses the disfigured and disgraced mother in disguise.

It should come as no surprise that Ouida—who was, arguably, more dedicated than any of the sensation novelists to changing the way in which female authorship was received by critics and general readers—was particularly concerned with critiquing the gender boundaries represented in the domestic novel. An intriguing example of this kind of critique is her 1865 novel *Strathmore*. Her second full-length novel, *Strathmore* revolves around a stunningly beautiful married woman, Lady Vavasour, who first induces the eponymous hero to fall in love with her and then goads him to murder his best friend Erroll in a fit of unfounded jealousy. After Erroll's death, Strathmore discovers the truth and vows to have revenge on his former lover. Aided by a gypsy woman who also hates Lady Vavasour, he learns that the Vavasours' marriage is a sham. He betrays Lady Vavasour's secret on the eve of her husband's death and she becomes an outcast from high society.

Meanwhile, Strathmore adopts Erroll's daughter from a clandestine marriage, a beautiful child called Lucille, and gives her to his mother to raise, withholding from her the fact that he murdered her father. Lucille grows into an angelic girl who, as soon as she enters society, is beset with offers of marriage, which she refuses because she has fallen in love with Strathmore instead. Determined to protect Lucille's happiness in order to atone for Erroll's murder, Strathmore decides to marry her and keep her father's fate a secret. His plans are put in jeopardy when Lord Valdor, one of Lucille's rejected suitors, discovers her identity and threatens to tell her the truth rather than allow Strathmore to marry her. Strathmore responds by arranging to have Valdor arrested and sentenced to hard labour on the Continent and the marriage goes ahead. One night following this, a ship is wrecked near Strathmore's home. He braves the waters and saves some of the passengers. Unwittingly about to save Lady Vavasour, who happens to be one of the stranded passengers, he discovers her identity and casts her into the sea. Against all odds, Lady Vavasour survives and vows revenge. Meanwhile, Strathmore's nephew, Lionel Caryll, discovers Valdor imprisoned in Toulon and assists him to escape. Valdor returns to England and tells Strathmore that he had never actually intended to betray his secret. However, Lady Vavasour overhears the conversation and, realising she has the means for her revenge, confronts Strathmore with her intention.



Ultimately, though, she has a change of heart and decides against destroying Lucille's happiness. She retires to a convent and Strathmore and Lucille are left to live happily together.

Its rather conventional ending notwithstanding, *Strathmore* is a critique of the performative nature of the gender roles that underpinned mid-Victorian domestic fiction and, concomitantly, structured mid-Victorian authorship. Although explicitly an aristocratic character, the contours of the domestic heroine are at once recognisable in Lady Vavasour. This conception of femininity is revealed to be an identity that is consciously performed in order to ensnare men and further her social aims. *Strathmore* is here clearly influenced by *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which Braddon famously uses the figure of Lady Audley—a bigamist and would-be murderer who, in order to further her social aims, pretends to be an angelic, childish, lovable woman—to shatter the naturalness of middle-class femininity. *Strathmore*, however, is simultaneously a more extensive and more subtle exposé of the constructed nature of middle-class femininity than *Lady Audley's Secret*.

Like Lady Audley, Lady Vavasour disguises a ruthless and cruel nature under a mask of domestic femininity that carefully preserves the binary oppositions around which middle-class femininity was constructed. Able to “summon at will every phase of womanhood” (185), she is, the narrator says quite explicitly,

too skilful not to know that the surest charm which a woman wields over men is the charm of difference—the charm of sex; and that half of this charm is flown when Christina of Sweden wears her Hessians and cracks her whip; when her imitators of to-day, chatter slang with weeds in their mouths, and swing through the stable-yards, talking in loud *rauque* voices, of dogs with a ‘good strain!’ (118-9)

The binary opposition between the genders outlined here is reinforced by the way in which Lady Vavasour’s beauty, one of her primary tools in ensnaring men, is described in terms that, like Amy’s and Charles’s hands in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, mark feminine difference from masculinity: softness, smallness, delicacy, and so on. More importantly, in order to trap Strathmore, Lady Vavasour expertly feigns qualities like simplicity, childishness, naturalness and emotionality; qualities that suggest, for example, the “*naïveté*” and “freshness” of Guy’s aunt in *The Heir of Redclyffe* or the “innocent, soft, helpless dignity” of Fanny in *The Clever Woman of the Family*. Take the following passage:

The words were few and simple; a young girl out of her convent could not have spoken more earnestly and touchingly than the woman of the world; where more florid, profuse, eloquently-studied words would have been set aside by him as the conventional utterances of necessity, these charmed and won him, these rang on his ear with the accent of truth. (94)

Lady Vavasour is indeed a consummate performer of the naturalness associated with the ideal middle-class woman. In one episode, she drops a bracelet, which provides the opportunity for Strathmore to admire her beautiful skin as he fastens it on her arm. The narrator notes that the bracelet

“*really* dropped, she was too highly finished a coquette to need any such vulgar and common-place ruses” (98). In a similar vein, Lady Vavasour deploys the ‘feminine’ quality of capriciousness to disguise her very real ambition. In one episode, she tells Strathmore that the “charm” that “rules me always” is “the caprice of the hour: I admit no other law!” (114). Given that throughout the entire novel she is always driven by a very definite ulterior motive, this is disingenuous at best.

The performative nature of the angel in the house is strongly emphasised by Lady Vavasour’s alignment with the theatre. A “more perfect actress than any the stage has seen” (284), she can feign any emotion so authentically that at times even the narrator is confused about her genuineness. The novel’s use of theatrical tropes goes far beyond simple statements of her acting ability, however. *Strathmore* is strikingly marked throughout by the tropes of the theatre, invoking in particular the dramatic tableau that was a feature of Victorian theatre, especially melodrama.<sup>33</sup> Lady Vavasour is presented in overtly staged scenes that evoke such tableaux, complete with elaborately described background, posed figure and references to painters suggestive of the painted backdrops popular on the Victorian stage. Take this passage:

With the scarlet coronal of flowers on her lovely amber hair, and the light of a sunny laughter beaming in her eyes; framed between the gossamer lace and brodered azure silk of the curtain draperies; a

form bright and brilliant and richly coloured as any picture of Watteau's, thrown out against the purple haze of the air, and the dark shadows of evening that were veiling the landscape beyond; there stood the blonde aux yeux noirs ... Marion, Marchioness of Vavasour! .... Involuntarily, unwittingly, he [Strathmore] stood a moment dazzled and surprised, looking at the delicate and glittering picture that was before him, painted in all its dainty coloring on the sombre canvas of the night. (93-4)

Framed by what looks like a painted backdrop and “curtain draperies” that are evocative of stage curtains, Lady Vavasour catches Strathmore's attention like an actress on a stage.

By using the figure of the actress, Ouida throws into question the naturalness of femininity and the male/female gender binary that structured authorship at the mid-century. The actress is, indeed, a particularly appropriate figure through which to unsettle the naturalness of gender ideology. Displaying her beauty for the gaze of the audience, the actress herself was the embodiment of contradictions in gender ideology, simultaneously intensely feminine and unsexed by her public performance (for many people, “the similarities between the actress's life and the prostitute's were unforgettable and overruled all other evidence about respectability” (Davis 69)). Most significantly, however, the actress succeeded in doing precisely what Lady Vavasour does: she embodied a public, theatrical persona while simultaneously (if she chose) performing the middle-class domestic angel as convincingly or naturally as possible.<sup>34</sup>

If Ouida undermines domestic femininity by exposing it as mere performance, she further undermines middle-class gender ideology by foregrounding her characters' occupation of a zone that lies in between the binary oppositions that, as I have explained, were central to such ideology.<sup>35</sup> In this, Ouida can be seen to move far beyond Braddon's critique of the performativity or unnaturalness of gender boundaries in *Lady Audley's Secret*. Ouida's exploration of gendered in-betweenness is evident in the resemblance that exists between Lady Vavasour and the male characters in the novel. There is, for example, similarity between Lady Vavasour's and Strathmore's careers, which fail to preserve the strict boundaries between masculine and feminine spheres of work emphasised in domestic novels like Craik's *Mistress and Maid*. Like Strathmore before and after he is ensnared by her, "the idol of Marion Vavasour's religion" is "POWER!" (193). Her "rule" of the "world" with "her foot on its neck" (74) is precisely what Strathmore aims for: "what he grasped, how he grasped, mattered nothing to him, so that he had his foot on bended necks" (318). The tools that Lady Vavasour uses in her rise to social power—the "skill of a born tactician" (75) and the ability to play "utterly unscrupulously, but equally matchlessly" (158) with men—also resemble the "subtle ruses" and "unscrupulous finesse" (318) that Strathmore deploys in his own political ascent. In one passage, Lady Vavasour even directly compares a woman's "rouge" with a

diplomat's "ruses" (103), forcing Strathmore to admit that "Enamelling *is* as much in favor in the cabinets as in the cabinets de toilette" (103). Indeed, Lady Vavasour regards political intrigue as a natural progression from social management, declaring, "I shall triumph by my beauty till that goes, and then I shall triumph by my intellect, which won't go. I shall tread my way on roses, and rule as Venus Victrix till grey hairs come and I have to take to enamelling; and then I shall change my sceptre, and begin écarté, embroglie, prudence, and politics" (52). Ouida thus suggests that hidden beneath the idealisation of women's domestic lives is a desire for power, and a capacity to achieve that power, that many fail to recognise.

*Strathmore* exposes middle-class gender ideology as performative and undermines the binary opposition set up between the sexes. And yet, just as the figure of the angel in the house or domestic heroine was taken to reflect gender identity in the real world, the men in *Strathmore* are—stupidly, the novel insinuates—duped into believing in Lady Vavasour's angelic persona. In particular, in a move that suggests that Ouida was commenting on the nature of the popularity of middle-class binary oppositions of gender in the real world, the male characters in *Strathmore* are willingly fooled by the deployment of pointedly flattering gender stereotypes. For example, in a manner reminiscent of the domestic novelists' downplaying of their professional lives, Lady Vavasour trivialises herself as

a woman while hinting at the much greater importance of Strathmore's diplomatic work. This taps into the flattering (for men) notion that while women, including women writers like Jane Austen, for example, are naturally interested in trivia, men concern themselves with 'serious' matters. At the same time, it disguises the way in which Lady Vavasour does the same kind of work as Strathmore. Thus in one passage Lady Vavasour tells Strathmore that "The toilette is to us [women] what ambition is to you, the first, and last, and only love—a ruling passion, strong in death! A statesman dying, asks, 'Is the treaty signed?' a woman dying, asks, 'Am I *bien coiffée*?'" (159-60). In another episode, when Strathmore quotes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hyperion*—"Lookest thou at the stars? / If I were Heaven, with all the eyes of Heaven / Would I look down on thee!" (150)—Lady Vavasour retorts, "Strathmore! you would do no such thing! If you had the eyes of Heaven, they would all be bent on watching conferences you cannot join, and in reading despatches you cannot see!" (150). The interest that men like Strathmore feel for women, Lady Vavasour implies, is easily superseded by their political responsibilities.

There is another irony here: not only is Lady Vavasour driven by exactly the same kinds of ambitions that she ascribes to men only, but her suggestion that women are unimportant to men also disguises the power that she exerts over them. Indeed, Lady Vavasour claims not to care for power or

to be able to use it on men, representing it instead as something masculine. After remarking that Mary, Queen of Scots was held captive at White Ladies, she says coquettishly, “I dare say my lord of Strathmore was a courtly but a pitiless gaoler, had many a courtier-phrase upon his tongue, but never relented to mercy! What a *triste souvenir*! I shall be afraid to come there; perhaps you will imprison me!” (127-8). What Lady Vavasour really thinks is made clear in a passage in which she turns conventional binary oppositions of gender on their head:

A woman who knows her power can always tax any negligence to her as heavily as she likes. How incomprehensively silly those women must be who become their lovers’ slaves, who hang on their words and seek their tenderness, and make themselves miserable at their infidelities. I cannot understand it; if there be a thing in the world easier to manage than another, it is a MAN! Weak, obstinate, wayward, loving what they cannot get, slighting what they hold in their hand, adoring what they have only on an insecure tenure, trampling on anything that lies at their mercy, always capricious to a constant mistress and constant to a capricious—men are all alike, there is nothing easier to keep in leading-strings when once you know their foibles. (76-7)

Not only does Lady Vavasour here put the lie to her earlier suggestion that power is a masculine quality, but qualities like weakness, irrationality and capriciousness that are usually linked with femininity (and by extension the feminine author) also suddenly become markers of masculinity. Femininity, by contrast, at least insofar as it is embodied by Lady Vavasour, is characterised by cool rationality.



Men's willingness to believe flattering gender stereotypes is so strong that they do so in the face of blatant evidence to the contrary. Strathmore is, the narrator says, perfectly aware that Lady Vavasour is "vain, spoiled, dangerous, and a consummate coquette, bent upon conquest, and not over-careful of her character—a glance told him that" (98). Yet in spite of himself he is taken in by her simulation of angelic femininity. In one passage, the narrator describes how "A momentary blush tinged her [Lady Vavasour's] cheek, making her loveliness lovelier, and not escaping Strathmore, though he knew how *grandes dames* can blush, as they can weep at their will when they need it to embellish their beauty, too well to be honoured by it" (95). Despite his knowledge about the falseness of Lady Vavasour's blushes, it is precisely a blush that assures Strathmore (erroneously) that she loves him:

A blush warm and lovely, if it were but a lie, wavered in her face; her eyes answered his with dreamy languor; the diamonds in her breast trembled with the heavings of her heart, and even while she hushed him and turned from him, her hand lingered within his.

He knew that he was loved! (167)

Even Erroll, who witnesses first-hand Strathmore's seduction by Lady Vavasour, forgets as he listens to her "that she who spoke was the arch-coquette of Europe, was the avowed mistress of Strathmore; he forgot that those words on her lips were a graceful lie without meaning, only uttered as the actress utters the words of the rôle she assumes for the hour" (191-2).

Perhaps the most obvious evidence of the instability of middle-class gender boundaries that the men in *Strathmore* fail to see, however, is the ambiguity of their own gendered identities. This ambiguity is the obvious consequence of the failure of gendered binary oppositions, traced ultimately to men themselves. As in other early novels like *Chandos* and *Under Two Flags*, Ouida's male characters are strikingly feminised. They call each other pet-names like "très-cher" and surround themselves with feminine things: Erroll wears a "seed-pearl brodered and sable-lined dressing-gown, dainty and lovely enough for Lady Millicent's wear" (27) and keeps rooms "dainty and luxurious enough to domicile Lady Millicent" (81); Château-Renard, one of Strathmore's friends, writes down his bets in "a little dainty jewelled book" (61). Their bodies are also feminised: Valdor is "slight, graceful, animated, delicately made" (83) with a hand "as small and delicate as that which the White Domino [*i.e.* Lady Vavasour] could boast" (84); Strathmore has a "singularly beautiful ... face" with "golden hair and azure eyes" that "a woman might envy him" (147).

The most interesting example of gendered in-betweenness in *Strathmore* is the relationship between Strathmore and Erroll, a friendship between men that closely mirrors the conventions of the domestic novel's traditional heterosexual romance. The undercurrent of homosexuality here is significant given Butler's belief that the "false stabilization" of gender

identity that she theorises is based on “an idealized and compulsory heterosexuality” (172). By bringing to the forefront homosexuality, and its disruption to the heterosexual channels of desire that link the gendered body to a ‘stable’ gendered identity, Ouida challenges the stability of that identity. Thus Strathmore’s and Erroll’s friendship is described in strikingly romantic terms and often directly compared with heterosexual love. Strathmore loves Erroll “instantly, blindly, and trustingly” with “a friendship for one another passing the love of women” (17), and he is depicted “looking with eyes of love upon Erroll” (130). Erroll speaks to Strathmore with a voice that is “rich and full ... like the voice of a woman when she speaks of or too that which he loves” (25). Lady Vavasour’s presence also sets up a love triangle between the three: the “unflattering and mistrustful words” that Erroll mutters to himself about her are signs of “a jealousy towards this woman” that “stirred in a heart which never harbored any acrid thought, or unjust envy to any living thing” (145). The narrator continues, emphasising the rivalry between Lady Vavasour and Erroll:

Is a man ever leniently disposed towards the woman whom his friend loved? Very rarely. She is his rival, and in lists, moreover, in which he can oppose nothing to his power. She supplants him, she invades his supremacy, fifty to one she is the cause of dispute between them; and he will see no good in this soft-skinned intruder, this dangerous Nazarene. (145)

As Erroll's love rival, Lady Vavasour induces Strathmore and Erroll to argue for the first time—"about her and her alone, passionate words had passed between him [Erroll] and the man he loved" (181)—and the argument causes "a flush of pain" to pass "Over Erroll's face," as "over a woman's at a brutal and unmerited word" (171). Lady Vavasour herself plainly recognises that Erroll is a rival for her love: when she sees "Strathmore's eyes lightened with pleasure as he recognized Erroll" (179), she moves to intervene: "this woman, rapacious, exacting, merciless, with the panther nature under her delicate loveliness, permitted no thought to wander away from her, allowed no single feeling to share dominion with her!" (179-80). Erroll's positioning as feminine lover is further emphasised by his behaviour after he quarrels with Strathmore. Like a love-sick heroine, he "almost unconsciously and irresistibly ... ceased ... to care to drive over to dine at the Café de Paris, and sup in the Bréda Quartier, as he had done hitherto, but stayed in preference to sit beside the window of an old man's sick room, with some opened novel, on which his eyes never glanced!" (189). Here at least, Erroll's behaviour is more recognisably 'feminine' than the coldly rational quest for power that motivates the superficially ultra-feminine Lady Vavasour.

Lady Vavasour's transgressions are, as I have already suggested, ultimately contained by her repentance and retreat to a convent at the end of the novel. However, her unsettling of gender conventions radiates throughout

the novel, directing us—perhaps surprisingly—to the character of Lucille. Ostensibly intended as an uncritical representation of the middle-class angel in the house, the performative nature of her femininity is exposed by the novel’s deconstruction of gender boundaries. At first glance, there is little to suggest that Ouida intends Lucille to be anything other than a positive manifestation of (more or less) conventional gender ideology. Immediately suggestive of middle-class domestic heroines like Fanny in *Clever Woman of the Family* or Muriel in *John Halifax*, Lucille seems to embody the Patmorian angel in the house: childish, modest, “in charity more angel-like than the grudging charities of earth” (521), teaching “all those who approached” her “to feel the sanctity and the purity of” her “rare nature” (429). Her “delicate intuition and susceptible affection” allow her to perceive “what she did not reason on” (415) (here the binary opposition between feminine intuition/emotionality and masculine reason is made explicit), and Strathmore marries her so she can be his salvation, “a breath of redemption” (579). Another quality that Ouida stresses is Lucille’s naturalness: in one episode she describes how she

threw herself at his [Strathmore’s] feet ... in that graceful and trustful abandon which was as natural to her now as when she had first come caressingly to his side on the sea-shore; for this opening life had been left free, pure, untrammelled by art or bondage as any of the white-winged birds which spent their summer days above the waves. (328)

Indeed, when describing her upbringing, Ouida even alludes to Ruskin's plan for girls' reading in *Sesame and Lilies*, in which he argues that while "you may chisel a boy into shape, as you would a rock, or hammer him into it ... as you would a piece of bronze" (81), such a strategy would fail for a girl:

She grows as a flower does,—she will wither without sun; she will decay in her sheath, as the narcissus does, if you do not give her air enough .... you cannot fetter her; she must take her own fair form and way, and in mind as in body, must have always  
     'Her household motions light and free,  
     And steps of virgin liberty.' (81-2)

Similarly, the narrator of *Strathmore* says,

Those to whom her [Lucille's] education was entrusted he [Strathmore] forbade to use any laws with her save those of gentleness, and directed to surround her with all tenderness, to shield her from every touch of pain or harshness, and to indulge her in all things. He was scrupulously obeyed, and the result might have been to many natures dangerous; but with Lucille, the inherent character was too loving and sweet to be thus harmed, to do aught but expand to all its richest luxuriance its purest delicacy in the constant sunlight in which it grew, though, perchance, as the hot-house flower is rendered unfit for the cold winds without by the warmth which surrounds it, so might this nature be for the harsh conflicts of life. (330)

The Ruskinian plant metaphor is evoked again later in the novel in specific reference to reading when Strathmore assures Lady Chessville that "Lucille will not be harmed by Georges Sand" and "Rousseau or De Kock would leave no stain *there*; the soil must be fit ere impure plants will take root" (394). These allusions to Ruskin—too overt not to be deliberate—invoke the

model of idealised middle-class femininity associated with his famous text and align Lucille with it.

If we look closer, however, there are suggestions that Ouida uses Lucille to critique conservative gender ideology. For a start, Lucille blindly showers her adoration on a man who (as the other characters recognise) has brutal and criminal tendencies—the murderer of her father, in fact. More tellingly, there is a distinct sense in which her character suggests the artificiality of Lady Vavasour’s performance of ideal femininity. The trope of acting that is so central to Lady Vavasour’s character is echoed in descriptions of Lucille. Like Lady Vavasour, she is often shown posing motionless in dramatic tableaux. The first time she is introduced to the reader, she is represented in a static pose, sitting “with her head slightly drooped and her lips slightly parted” (322) in an elaborately described scene, “A soft, serene, richly-tinted picture, fairer than a thought of Lancret’s, more golden tranquil than a dream of Claude’s” (321). She is depicted in another elaborate scene the first time that Strathmore is shown meeting her: “half buried in the flowers, lying in the graceful abandon of a child’s repose, resting her head upon her hand in the attitude of Guido’s ‘Leggiatura’” (341). Indeed, Lucille’s appearances in the text have an unshakeable sense of being staged or posed. While in the throes of anguish, for example, Strathmore happens to look up to see Lucille in the romantic attitude of

feeding a fawn with “rose-leaves” (432). Ouida also suggests the profound unnaturalness of the domestic ideal that Lucille performs more subtly through her sheer staginess—her habit of referring to herself in the third person, for instance, or her tendency to statements of such extravagant naïveté (“I thought the very poorest had some one to love them?” (527)) that it is hard to take them seriously. If, as Butler suggests, “the ground of gender” is “not a seemingly seamless identity” but a “stylized repetition of acts through time” that will periodically “be displaced and revealed as a stylized configuration” (179), then Ouida here quietly facilitates the displacement of that gendered identity by exposing the cracks in the veneer that covers over its fictionality.<sup>36</sup>

The sense of artificiality that attaches itself to Lucille’s femininity is compounded by the way in which she is so often aligned with texts or artworks, giving her character a strong sense of being less a believable human character than a collection of cultural references that issue from a male perspective. To Valdor she is “the most beautiful poem, picture—Heaven knows what—that every I beheld” (341). She reminds him of “some head of Guido, some fantasy of Carlo Dolci” (342). Strathmore looks out the window to see her (in another posed or staged sighting) “bending down among the flowers like Milton’s Proserpine: ‘Herself the fairest flower’” (360). In another scene, the narrator describes Lucille’s adoration of



Strathmore: “she might have been painted for Vivia Perpetua in her young and holy loveliness, willing to endure all things even unto death in defence and in reverence for her Lord” (408). The references to Ruskin I have already mentioned. By aligning Lucille so insistently with cultural references to femininity in art and literature, Ouida implies that the domestic heroine is less a real woman than a male construction or convention of culture.

If Lucille’s femininity, like Lady Vavasour’s, is performative rather than intrinsic, one is led to ask what other things she might be concealing. Certainly, if she does not openly express the same motives, she achieves Lady Vavasour’s ultimate goal: wealth and high status through the seduction of Strathmore. Closer scrutiny reveals further unsettling similarities between Lucille and Lady Vavasour. In her rise to social status, Lucille repeats many of Lady Vavasour’s key actions, such as reciting the Strathmore ancestral poem, or seducing Strathmore with a burst into sudden and enchanting song (45, 359-60). Likewise, Lady Vavasour’s first appearance in the text, in which she reclines in a boat leisurely cruising down the Moldau River—a central moment in her seduction of Strathmore—is mirrored in a later scene in which Lucille, also lounging on cushions, glides down the Sheen in a boat shaped like a Greek felucca (519-20).

What seems to arise is the possibility that the dupe this time is the reader who fails to see the artificiality of the domestic heroine and thus takes

Lucille at face value. In the first part of this chapter, I showed how female authorship was determined by gender boundaries that delimited what women could write, prevented them from exploiting professional opportunities fully, and circumscribed their potential to be taken seriously as artists. If, as I also argued, the domestic novel was an important site in the manufacturing of these middle-class gender boundaries, it is the reader who trusts and internalises such novels' representation of gender who underpins this system in which women writers are marginalised. The character of Lucille subversively satirises this naïve, but dangerous, reader.

As the same time that the men in *Strathmore* believe Lady Vavasour's flattering gender stereotypes at their peril, Lucille presents Strathmore—and, simultaneously, the male reader—with similar flattery. For one, Lucille's enumeration of Strathmore's virtues is so excessive that it is difficult not to see a sardonic ring to, for example, this response to Strathmore's inquiry into her thoughts: "I was thinking of how great you are, and how good; and how you who sway men with your word, and empires with your will, yet have so much care, and thought, and love for me" (374). After all, Ouida emphatically does *not* portray Strathmore as a paragon of virtue, or even a good man: he is a murderer who is not only responsible for the death of Lucille's father but ruthless enough to condemn an innocent friend to slavery. Lucille's words mirror Lady Vavasour's own flattery of

Strathmore and read less like the dialogue of a convincing character than a representation of masculine fantasy. Lucille's professed absorption with Strathmore is likewise more convincing as masculine fantasy than as a plausible sentiment. The lack of self-awareness on the part of Strathmore—and, perhaps, the reader too—is particularly suggested by his exhortation to Lucille to “Remember, I read your heart like an open book, and can see all that is written there” (349). Here, Strathmore makes a not uncommon masculine claim to knowledge of femininity that I will explore further in subsequent chapters—the irony here, of course, is that not only has Strathmore's ability to read women's hearts already failed spectacularly earlier in the novel, but he also fails to see the obvious fact that Lucille has fallen (or pretended to fall?) in love with him.

The character of Lucille, then, at first seemingly so conventional, subversively undermines gender boundaries as they were deployed in the domestic novel. As a text that dismantles the binary oppositions of gender that delimited mid-Victorian women writers, *Strathmore* is thus an apt companion piece to Ouida's own assumption of an assertive, serious artistic identity. Aligning herself with the sensation novelists' rebellion against middle-class gender mores, and specifically borrowing from and expanding upon Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Ouida challenges the gendered binary oppositions that were deployed to contain her as a writer. By exploiting those

contradictions already present within middle-class gender ideology, she shows that masculinity and femininity are not separated by rigid boundaries, but fluid and ambiguous. As I will show in the following chapters, which focus more closely on Ouida's assumption of a career as a serious artist, this interest in challenging gender boundaries was to be an enduring one. Long after she distanced herself from the sensation fiction movement, Ouida continued to challenge the gendering of the ideological web in which her writing was produced and received.

## Chapter Two: *Tricotrin*, Professionalism and High Art

In 1869, Ouida published her sixth novel, *Tricotrin*, a tale of bohemian life that is modelled upon George Sand's early and highly romanticised account of bohemian artistic culture, *La dernière Aldini* (1839). Although Ouida's writing never lost its flamboyant touch, *Tricotrin* is a significant departure from her earlier novels. The extravagant aristocratic characters of *Chandos* and *Strathmore* are toned down, it is the first of her novels to attend to peasant life, and, most importantly, it was her first novel about an artist. The change was not lost on contemporary reviewers: in the eyes of the *Contemporary Review* it was "a decided improvement on such former works of 'Ouida' as have fallen in our way" (rev. *Tricotrin* 315), while the *Athenaeum* regarded it "in many respects an improvement on its predecessors" (rev. *Tricotrin* 15). The shift of direction signalled by *Tricotrin* also coincides with a significant moment in the development of the serious novel in Britain. The arrival of sensation fiction on the literary marketplace in the 1860s was, as Bradley Deane argues in *The Making of the Victorian Novelist: Anxieties of Authorship in the Mass Market*, responsible for a fissure that would lead to the splitting of the high art novel from the popular novel. Before the 1860s, popularity was viewed positively by the Victorian critical establishment. The sensation fiction craze, however, forced

middle-class readers to acknowledge that they shared their reading public with the working classes, causing certain novelists and critics to distance themselves from the general public and helping to manufacture the critical binary opposition between serious art and art debased by its ties to the marketplace. In the words of Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin in *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change*, “[b]y 1870 men of letters were using the term *high culture* to set off novels they admired from those they deemed run-of-the mill” (3); while by around 1880 popularity was a dirty word and formerly admired popular writers like Dickens and Trollope had experienced downturns in their critical reputations.

The splitting of the novel into high art and popular forms was simultaneously a split along gendered lines. Many theorists have observed women’s link with popular art; indeed, for as long as popular culture has begun to be theorised, it has been associated—whether more or less overtly—with women. The *Pall Mall Gazette* makes the connection more overtly in 1870, stating:

The art or trade of story-telling in three volumes has become a branch of industry of which the ladies are securing for themselves almost a monopoly. The great bales of fiction which are constantly manufactured owe their chief proportions and bulk to female talent and diligence. (‘Peculiarities’ 226)

By the turn of the twentieth century, as Andreas Huyssen remarks, “it is indeed striking to observe how ... political, psychological, and aesthetic

discourse ... consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities” (47). Tuchman and Fortin see such gendering as symptomatic of the way in which women were ‘edged’ out of the high art novel, which was in turn gendered masculine. Yet, for all that Ouida may indisputably have been a popular woman writer, by the time *Tricotrín* was published she was vehement in her belief that she was a serious artist. *Tricotrín* can, therefore, be read as a response to the particular difficulties facing a popular woman writer who aspired to be taken seriously in the late 1860s. More specifically, I argue that in this novel Ouida challenges the gendered lines upon which high and popular art were splitting and attempts to carve out a place for a woman writer to be taken seriously within the fledgling high art novel.

Central to the construction of the high art/popular art divide that informs the writing of *Tricotrín* was the ideology of professionalism. In 1860, the link between professionalism and literary identity was not a new one. As Romantic scholars have recently noticed, it was first made by the Romantic poets, particularly William Wordsworth.<sup>37</sup> The connection between novelistic artisthood and professionalism, however, surfaces significantly for the first time in the 1840s and 1850s as the novel struggled to shake off its disreputable association in the eighteenth century with

women, sex and consumerism and become recognised as serious art.<sup>38</sup> Signs of ambivalence towards the novel are notable throughout this period: in 1855, for example, the *Quarterly Review*'s judgement of Thackeray's *The Newcomes* was that it was "one of the masterpieces of English fiction, if fiction is the proper term" for "such a great work" (cited in Stang 46). Richard Stang points out that *The Newcomes* was the first novel the *Quarterly* had reviewed since Elizabeth Rigby's attack on *Jane Eyre* in 1848, and argues that the *Quarterly*'s refusal generally to review novels throughout the 1850s and 60s, while extreme, was symptomatic of the fact that some "stigma" (46) was still "attached to the word *novel*" (47), which continued in some quarters to be a synonym for 'light literature.' Nonetheless, attempts to theorise a (predominantly realist) aesthetic for the novel, of which those by George Henry Lewes and George Eliot are particularly notable, became increasingly sophisticated during this period. Furthermore, explicit connections between the novel and art, such as that made in the following excerpt from an 1853 article in the *Westminster Review* titled 'The Progress of Fiction as an Art,' were not uncommon:

the old romance-writers ... did not look at life aesthetically; they had no idea of depicting feelings and experiences in the strict analytical fashion, so much in vogue at the present time; and indeed, had they proposed such an object to themselves, they could hardly have produced a picture which we should recognise. Word-painting is an art, a great and difficult art, and one which does not exist in an unlettered age. The flimsiest modern novel that ever young lady



devoured, or critic sneered at, is infinitely superior in artistic arrangement and skilful continuity of plot to even the most readable of ancient fictions. (75-6)

This writer's emphasis on the modern novel's form, its alignment with painting and its difficulty puts forward a clear claim for the novel as serious art.

The appropriation of professional ideology was an important part of the attempt to establish the novel as a serious art form. Authors often used the term 'professional' to describe themselves, while some attempted to align themselves more explicitly with professional ideology. An 1852 article in the *Westminster Review* titled 'The Profession of Literature,' for example, ranks a failed writer called William Jerdan, whose autobiography the article reviews, amongst those who prevent literature from occupying "that rank as a profession ... it is justified in claiming" (519). The author of the article accuses men like Jerdan of tarnishing literature's professional reputation by entering into it with the sole expectation of large profits, and criticises him for complaining that literature is "not as productive of money as the cotton-mill or the smelting-house" (518). While it certainly is not "paid as it ought to be" (519), the reviewer says, "the aims of literature do not lie in that direction" (525) because "The literary man has a glory which is denied to the manufacturer, nor would he envy him his wealth if he knew how to appreciate his own position at its true value" (519). In other words, if the

literary profession ought to receive generous remuneration, the reviewer argues, it is simultaneously directed by a higher, intellectual and benevolent, aim that distances it from the marketplace. The *Westminster Review* writer also attacks Jerdan for lacking the proper professional qualifications, protesting that “There is no profession so crowded with men so deficient in the qualifications, required for their work” (521) and asking,

What result other than disappointment can be anticipated from the inveterate folly of a man who persists in a pursuit which he has taken up without the least previous training of his faculties, without study or preparation of any kind? The meanest calling requires some qualifications, and literature most of all. (522)

The *Westminster* writer is drawing here upon some of the central tenets of modern professionalism, which during the nineteenth century developed out of earlier forms of professionalism, or what the sociologist Phillip Elliott has labelled “status professionalism.”<sup>39</sup> Under status professionalism, the professions consisted simply of three occupations designed for the younger sons of the gentry who would not inherit land: the bar, the clergy, and medicine. In order to qualify for these occupations, men were required to exhibit not specialised professional knowledge (of which it was possible to have virtually none), but gentlemanly status, the skills for which were learned at the ancient universities.<sup>40</sup> During the nineteenth century, the focus of professional identity shifted to the acquirement of specialised intellectual knowledge and occupations like architecture,

engineering and science were admitted into the professions. Under this new form of professionalism, or what Elliott calls “occupational professionalism,” professional “credibility” is crucially founded on “the claim to sole control of superior expertise” (Larson 13), with the consequence that the professions function as autonomous bodies regulating their own specialised knowledge. These bodies also oversee a sustained course of training that, as the *Westminster* writer acknowledges, is an essential part of professional development. Professional knowledge is protected from the general public not only by this control over who can teach and exercise it, but through the mystification of jargon, and it derives much of its status from what the influential theorist of professionalism, Everett Hughes, describes as the professional’s knowledge of the private self—the “guilty knowledge” (81) of the priest who hears confessions or the physician who treats disease. Also characteristic of occupational professionalism, if not yet apparent in the *Westminster Review* article, is its link with scientific discourse: the appropriation of qualities like rationalism and impartiality. While Magali Sarfatti Larson suggests that “in the nineteenth century” the “ideological appeal” of “rationalization” as “embodied in the scientific ethos” (56) “still appealed only to small enlightened minorities” and “could not provide a general basis of legitimation” (57), the historical evidence suggests otherwise. Arguing that “science ... deeply affected the nature of

almost all the other [intellectual] disciplines” during the nineteenth century, T. S. Heyck shows how occupations seeking to be professionalised during the nineteenth century (Heyck uses history as a case study) adopted scientific method. As the case of medicine illustrates, scientific method also influenced the already established professions as they shifted towards occupational professionalism (Elliott 35-6). Many historians, including Heyck, have outlined how scientists were concomitantly a major part of the drive towards occupational professionalism at the universities, which had a central role in the production of status professionalism and then became central to the production of occupational professionalism. Indeed, science lends itself particularly well to aspects of occupational professional aims such as the service ethic, specialisation and intellectual rigour.

The rationalism of occupational professionalism gestures towards the way in which it helped to manage anxieties about capitalism while locating a place for prestige within in it. Professionalism is in many ways a reflection of the nineteenth century capitalist spirit. Heyck points out how the specialisation of professionalism is “inspired and legitimated by the deeply-ingrained principle of the division of labour articulated by Adam Smith and accepted as essential to material progress by Victorian political economy” (86). Similarly, professionalism’s emphasis on rationalism belonged to a wider response to anxieties about capitalism. As Rita Felski explains, unease

about the irrational desire that fuels consumption led Victorians to emphasise the rationalism of capitalist production.<sup>41</sup> At the same time that occupational professionalism shares important aspects of the capitalist spirit, however, it simultaneously attempts to evade that connection, claiming to provide a service analogous with a particular ethic of “responsibility towards society” (Rothblatt 91) that operates independently of the marketplace. Crucially, though, while, in the words of Hughes, professional work is ostensibly “*not pursued for gain*,” it is considered that it “must bring their practitioners income of such a level that they will be respected and such a manner of living that they may pursue the life of the mind” (cited in Larson 9, italics Larson’s); indeed, much of the prestige of the professional is derived from the high reparation that his work demands. Occupational professionalism, then, as reflected in the *Westminster Review*’s claim that authors should be well-paid while not aiming for financial profit, is simultaneously based on evasion of *and* reliance upon capitalist exchange.

The *Westminster* reviewer’s claim for literary professionalism was not an isolated one during this period. William Thackeray, who openly ridiculed Bulwer Lyttonesque claims for novelistic artisthood, significantly frames his demystification of authorship in an attempt to debunk literary professionalism. (Indeed, the outcry provoked by Thackeray’s cynical attitude towards literary professionalism, as illustrated by the ‘Dignity of

Literature' debate that was carried out in the pages of the *Morning Chronicle* and the *Examiner* in January 1850, reveals that authors were aware of just how much was invested in the professionalism of the author.)<sup>42</sup> Thackeray's stance on professionalism is evident in his 1849 fictional literary biography *Pendennis*, but it is most explicitly outlined in an article he wrote for *Fraser's Magazine* in 1846 titled 'A Brother of the Press on the History of a Literary Man, Laman Blanchard, and the Chances of the Literary Profession.' In this essay, Thackeray openly delineates literature's commodity status, describing how "The literary man gets his bread by providing goods suited to the consumption" of this "honest stupid empire" (445) and pooh-poohing the notion that writers do not write for money: "no man supposes he would work perpetually but for money" (445). He also denies any sense of a higher calling amongst literary artists, criticising Bulwer Lytton for representing the writer and journalist Samuel Laman Blanchard as a paragon of "beautiful heroism" with "untiring love for his ... noble and yet thankless calling" (449). Thackeray points out that "his calling was not thankless; his career, in the main, pleasant" and "his disappointment, if he had one of the higher aims of ambition, one that might not uneasily be borne" (445). A similar denial of the transcendence of professional aims is laid out earlier in the essay, when Thackeray takes "a stand" against those

who, like Doctor Arnold, believe only serious literature should be read, promoting instead “light sketches” that “amuse” (444) the public:

Laughing is not the highest occupation of a man, very certainly; or the power of creating it the height of genius .... No more is the blacking of boots the greatest occupation. But it is done, and well and honestly, by persons ordained to that calling in life, who arrogate to themselves ... no especial rank or privilege on account of their calling; and not considering boot-brushing the greatest effort of earthly genius, nevertheless select their Day and Martin, or Warren, to the best of their judgement; polish their upper-leathers as well as they can; satisfy their patrons; and earn their fair wage. (445)

After thus debunking novelists’ claims to a higher calling than that of other workers, Thackeray disposes of the idea that writing depends on special (professional) training or talent: “it requires,” he says, “no vast power of intellect to write most sets of words, and have them printed in a book:—To write this article, for instance, or the last novel, pamphlet, book of travels. Most men with a decent education and practice of the pen, could go and do the like, were they so professionally urged” (450). It should be noted that Thackeray’s aim in this article is not just to target literary men’s claims to professionalism, but to debunk professionalism generally. Pointing out that the only “criterion for respectability” (446) in middle-class society is money, he openly aligns traditional professions with the trades: “The commodities in which the lawyer and the doctor deal are absolutely required by the public, and liberally paid for; every day, too, the public requires more literary handicraft done; the practitioner in that trade gets a better pay and place”

(446). In this way, Thackeray undermines the professional's claim to labour for a worthier cause than material profit and collapses the crucial status distinction between the professions and the trades.

The early representations of literary professionalism evident in Thackeray's article and the essay in the *Westminster Review* may have been direct in their references to professionalism, but the aspects of that ideology that they emphasise are professional training and the need to evade the professional's link with the marketplace. Other professional qualities, such as rationalism and autonomy, are ignored. This situation was, however, transformed after the arrival of sensation fiction on the literary marketplace in the 1860s and the critical response that followed.

The critical response to Ouida was in many ways closely connected with the critical response to sensation fiction. While, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Ouida's rejection of the middle-class settings integral to sensation fiction mean she cannot be classified as a sensation writer *per se*, both the content of her novels and her approach to authorship aligned her with writers like Braddon and Wood. This affinity was recognised by contemporary reviewers, who occasionally describe her as a sensation writer (although it is not quite accurate to say, as Natalie Schroeder does, that "critics at first branded Ouida a sensation novelist" (*Moths* 19)).<sup>43</sup> Ouida's novels were also often reviewed or discussed together with those by



sensation writers like Braddon and Wood, as in Margaret Oliphant's 1867 article 'Novels,' published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, or the anonymously authored 'Women's Novels' in *The Broadway* (1868). As we shall see, though, the most striking way in which reviewers expressed their sense that Ouida shared similarities with the sensation school was through the use of the same kind of language associated with responses to sensation fiction.

The critical response to sensation fiction—and Ouida—strikingly produced the image of the popular artist against whom the developing high artist was to be constructed during the course of the second half of the nineteenth century. In this response, the popular artist is, crucially, represented as unprofessional. Retaining earlier references to literary training and, of course, evasion of the marketplace, literary professionalism from this point on for the first time incorporates fully the character of occupational professionalism. Indeed, it is noticeable that while, with some exceptions (Walter Besant being the most notable), overt references to professionalism fade from attempts to assign authors artistic prestige after the 1860s, the *terms* of professionalism itself become far more pronounced in constructions of literary artisthood. It is, for example, in the response to sensation fiction that we find for the first time the characterisation of the popular novel as an irrational genre, appealing to emotional excess and sensation rather than

reason. Dean Mansel's verdict in 1863 that sensation fiction preaches "to the nerves instead of the judgement" (482) is symptomatic of the same impulse that led critics to object variously to Ouida's "gushing, sensuous sentimentality" (*Academy* rev. *Santa Barbara* 11) and the occupation of her "inconsequent" talent with "the ecstasy [sic] of animal passion" (Acland 827). Of particular note in such criticism is the language of intoxication, addiction, thirst and hunger which, as many scholars have noticed, is startlingly present in reviews of sensation fiction (a critic for *St. James's Magazine* compared sensation novels to bread that had had gin added to it ('Philosophy of Sensation' 17)) and also pervades criticism of Ouida's novels.<sup>44</sup> In an 1873 article in the *Contemporary Review*, for example, Vincent Murray compares the consumption of her novels with "a sort of mental dram-drinking" in which the reader becomes addicted to both the "flaring theatrical gas" which "is palmed off upon us for sunlight" and the "platitudes, for which a Tupper would blush" which assume the place of "reflection" (921). The language used in these responses suffuses descriptions of popular fiction in the second half of the nineteenth century: nearly thirty years after Mansel's article, Eliza Lynn Linton, writing for the *Fortnightly Review*, deplored the "cartloads of absolute rubbish" filled with "grotesque ... sensationalism" and "vapid sentimentality" (cited in Federico 59), while an 1887 *Edinburgh Review* article entitled 'The Literature of the

Streets' that investigated the kinds of books read by the "millions of youthful and hungry readers" (41) claimed that the "ravenous appetite" (61) of these readers is plied with literature in which "Every morsel of food is doctored, every draught of wine is drugged; no true hunger is satisfied, no true thirst quenched; and the hapless guests depart with a depraved appetite, and a palate more than ever dead to every pure taste" (65). Again, popular fiction is represented as an unwholesome substance that appeals to and enslaves the animal appetites.<sup>45</sup>

Serious fiction after the 1860s was, meanwhile, increasingly linked with rationality and scientific method. In line with the growing importance of scientific discourse to professionalism, serious writers of fiction more and more emphasise rationality and impartiality, a strategy that culminates with T. S. Eliot's assertion that in its depersonalization art should approach the condition of science (17). The growing concern with artistic form in the second half of the nineteenth century is also a reflection of this scientific, rational impulse, as is the growing concern with 'analysis' that was particularly associated with the new American fiction of Henry James and William Dean Howells.

Another professional quality that becomes much more significant for novelistic authorship after the 1860s is authorial autonomy over the production of the literary text. Prior to this period, the novel's subjection to

the marketplace prevented authors from assuming professional autonomy and hence becoming properly professionalised. This subjection is evident in what Mary Poovey has identified as a representation of the author shared by “many literary men” (106) at this time, in which the writer, in contrast to other professionals, “participate[s] in a free trade of ideas that inevitably reward[s] the best man” (106). This “laissez-faire image of writing,” Poovey argues, “reaches its logical conclusion in Thomas Carlyle’s critical assessment [in his 1840 lecture ‘The Hero as Man of Letters’] of the ‘democracy’ that writing allows” (107). Poovey cites as illustration of this model of authorship the review of Jerdan’s autobiography in the *Westminster Review*, discussed above:

In other professions ... there are definite advantages, offices, and gains, which ability, perseverance, and vigilance in the seizure of favourable opportunities, may ultimately hope to achieve .... But literature presents none of these temptations in prospect; it has no offices to give away, no sinecures, no penalties, no snug retreats from work and poverty, for the idle, the profligate, and the incapable; interest can do nothing, patronage can do nothing in literature; the appeal lies direct from the author to the public, and distinction must be won and carved out by merit alone. (cited in Poovey 106-7)

This image of authorship gestures towards a faith in the artistic judgment of the reading public—which rewards the skilled author with financial success—that is at odds with professional autonomy. The broader implication of this faith is reflected in what Bradley Deane in *The Making of the Victorian Novelist: Anxieties of Authorship in the Mass Market* describes

as the ideal of authorial sympathy, which he regards as epitomised by Charles Dickens and associates with the early- to mid-Victorian novelist (indeed, Poovey herself links the entrepreneurial image of the writer with the Dickensian ideal of authorial sympathy (108-9)) prior to the advent of sensation fiction. The ideal is nicely expressed by one contemporary, who claimed, “No one thinks first of Mr. Dickens as a writer .... He is at once, through his books, a friend” (cited in Deane 28). According to Deane, such sentiments involve an assumption of equality with the reading public that could reward authors, if they were lucky, with an affectionate and loyal reading public. While it would not be quite accurate to state that Dickens (who famously refused to bow to public pressure to let Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* live) and other writers of his generation did not value artistic autonomy at all, this sympathy with the reading public did simultaneously deprive them of the professional autonomy of the Romantic and Victorian poets, whose work was produced in relative freedom from the pressures of the marketplace.<sup>46</sup>

This authorial sympathy towards the reading public was fundamentally altered by the arrival of sensation fiction on the literary marketplace. Sensation fiction, and the popular fiction that came after it, were regarded by critical commentators as prostituted to its audience’s desire, slavishly “administer[ing]” to the public’s “craving” for “mental

intoxication” (‘Thackeray and Modern Fiction’ 77). Such criticism of the popular writer’s lack of autonomy was also reflected in accusations that their fiction was derivative. This charge is particularly evident in reviews of Ouida’s novels: *Idalia*, for example, prompted the *Westminster Review* to observe that “the question” of “what becomes of old novels” has been “completely solved”: “They are, it appears, worked over again” (571). Other critics claimed that Ouida’s stories were taken from French novels (*Athenaeum* rev. *Strathmore* 142; *Academy* rev. *Signa* 7), while Henry James argued in an 1875 review of *Signa* that “Ouida’s notion of training, apparently, has been to read a good deal of Victor Hugo and a little of Swinburne’s prose, and to try and produce something which should suggest a compound of these masters” (1194). Not only is Ouida’s fiction derivative, James suggests, but she also does not even succeed at copying her models.

After the 1860s there was, meanwhile, a new emphasis on the autonomy of the serious writer as authors like Henry James and George Moore agitated to control the content of their fiction. Moore’s 1885 pamphlet ‘Literature at Nurse,’ a response to Charles Mudie’s stranglehold over the moral regulation of novels, pointedly expresses indignation that “a mere tradesman” should “assum[e] to exercise” censorship “over the literature of the entire English press” (17). A similar theme can be traced in James’s landmark 1884 essay ‘The Art of Fiction,’ in which he argues that the “good

health” of the novelistic art “lives upon .... freedom to feel and say” because “The execution belongs to the author alone” (73). In line with mainstream professionalism, James closely protects the novelist’s professional knowledge from the general public: “His manner is his secret .... He cannot disclose it, as a general thing, if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others” (73). This is not to say that James does not believe in professional training, for he states that “The cultivation of this success [in capturing the illusion of life], the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist” (76). The point here is that professional training and method are not open to the general public, for clearly only specially talented people are able to undertake it with any success. Significantly, the developing high art was also designed increasingly to alienate the general public, thus preserving it for an elite, ‘professional’ audience. Many critics struggled, for example, with James’s and Howells’s failure to satisfy readers’ expectations of a traditional beginning, middle and end (others, however, approved of the new elitist fiction). Likewise, the comparative difficulty of James’s fiction is intensified in the work of later writers, culminating in the obscure, highly personal allusions of the modernists. Such mystification may be seen as analogous to the way in which jargon in traditional professions protects professional knowledge from non-professionals.<sup>47</sup>

Although knowledge of human nature was broadly admired before 1860, the ‘deep’ knowledge associated with professionalism gained a new emphasis after this period as sensation fiction was strikingly represented in the language of superficiality. Mansel expresses this superficiality in the following way:

A sensation novel, as a matter of course, abounds in incident. Indeed, as a general rule, it consists of nothing else. Deep knowledge of human nature, graphic delineations of individual character, vivid representations of the aspects of Nature or the workings of the soul—all the higher features of the creative art—would be a hindrance rather than a help to a work of this kind. (486).

Such criticism was directed at Ouida, with *Strathmore* provoking the *Athenaeum* reviewer to declare that “So far as knowledge of human nature goes, she [Ouida] has absolutely none .... There is a great deal of colour in the story, but no depth; the observations ... are bright and shallow, with coloured foil beneath them” (142). The transience of popular art was seen as a direct consequence of popular fiction’s superficiality and its ties to the marketplace: as Mansel puts it, its “circumstances of production”—periodicals, lending libraries and railway bookstores—result in products “Written to meet an ephemeral demand, aspiring only to an ephemeral existence” and utilising “rapid and ephemeral methods of awakening the interest of their readers” (485). References to superficiality pervade descriptions of popular fiction throughout the century. In his 1896 short story



‘The Next Time,’ for example, Henry James describes how the popular writer Mrs. Highmore attempts to write high art by being “what she called subtle”; however, “her fond consumers, bless them, didn’t suspect the trick nor show what they thought of it: they straightaway rose on the contrary to the morsel she had hoped to hold too high, and, making but a big, cheerful bite of it, wagged their great collective tail artlessly for more” (488).

The professionalisation of high art has wider implications than those discussed above: that is, because it is inherently gendered masculine, professionalism facilitates the gendering of high and popular art. This can be illustrated by an examination of Victorian theories about women’s writing, which, as Showalter points out, burgeoned in the 1850s and 1860s (74), the same period in which the professionalisation of the novelist was becoming established. To start with, as Felski discusses at length in *The Gender of Modernity*, the nineteenth century binary separating rational production from irrational consumption was a gendered one. Such gendering is replicated in nineteenth century representations of women’s writing. While, as I indicated in the previous chapter, the “Masculine mind” was associated with “the predominance of the intellect” (Lewes ‘Lady Novelists’ 41-2) and its accompanying qualities of reason and rationality (and hence professionalism), the “Feminine” mind was associated with “the predominance of the emotions” (42) and its sisters intuition and irrationality.

As emotional, rather than rational, creatures, women writers were automatically rendered unprofessional, a stance that a writer for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1853 makes clear when he (or she) states that women writers "are apt to bring prominently forward all those mere off-sets from the main subject which a sound lawyer or moderately wise man would leave out of the discussion as apt to divert attention from the main point, and put clear logic out of court" ('Lady Novelists' 19). Similarly, women were denied the skill at analysis later linked with the high art novelist. E. S. Dallas thus claims in *Blackwood's* in 1857 that "Men excel in analysis, women generally fail," a state of affairs that he sees illustrated in Charlotte Brontë's "morbid tendency to anatomize every passion, every impulse, every expression" (rev. *Poems* 362).

Victorian women writers were also refused professional autonomy. This can be seen by examining one especial inflection of the belief in women's lack of rationality: the conviction in female artlessness or intuition. According to the *Quarterly Review* in 1869, women, whose "duties ... do not to any great extent lie in the intellectual field," have "sprightly intuition" in place of "the reasoning faculty which a laborious education has developed in man" (Burrows 144). This belief was persistent throughout the century, even after critical emphasis had shifted, according to Tuchman and Fortin, towards pointing out women's faulty construction. As Stephen Gwynn said

of Margaret Oliphant's writing in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1899: "The words flow simply and smoothly ... and the style answers by a sort of instinct to each inflection of the voice. She is thinking more about what she has to say than about the way in which she is to say it" (cited in Tuchman and Fortin 191). This characterisation of women's writing as intuitive, rather than rational, effectively strips women writers of professional autonomy: a nineteenth-century woman writer, in the words of Ann D. Wood, was believed to write "because she cannot help it"; her writing is an unconscious response "to the calls of home and God" (8). Furthermore, since women writers were seen, in the words of the *Saturday Review* in 1865, as "essentially receptive and not creative" (cited in Helsinger et al 16), they were imagined to be susceptible to faddish literary trends. Lewes put it the following way: "the literature of women has fallen short of its function, owing to a very natural and very explicable weakness—it has been too much a literature of imitation" ('Lady Novelists' 42). This assumption was echoed by Besant in 1882, when he claimed that "real" women are "carried away by every wind of doctrine; as, for instance ... in Art, where, for want of a standard, she is led astray by every fad and fashion of the day, and worships sad-faced flatnesses with rapture" (211). No wonder, then, that Eliot should argue that "Women have not to prove that they can be emotional, and rhapsodic, and spiritualistic .... They have to prove that they are capable of

accurate thought, severe study, and continuous self-command” (‘Three Novels’ 334). The denial of professional autonomy to women is also evident not only in the expectation that women writers downplay their agency in starting their writing careers, which I discussed in the previous chapter, but in the tendency to credit a male mentor with women writers’ successes. This was (and is) especially true of Eliot, of whom, for example, Reade claimed that “her greatest quality of all is living with an anonymous writer [Lewes], who had bought the English press for a time and puffed her into a condition she cannot maintain” (cited in Thompson 35), while John Morley wrote in a letter to a friend that her work is “second-hand culture got partly ... from that very superficial creature she lived with” (cited in Tuchman and Fortin 72).<sup>48</sup>

As Henry James’s ridicule of Ouida’s misguided attempt to acquire literary “training” by reading and reproducing Hugo and Swinburne suggests, the gendering of literary professionalism can also clearly be seen in those qualities that were believed to constitute professional literary training. Just what comprises professional literary training before and after 1860 is usually somewhat vague, but it can generally be defined as a period of intense study of literature, particularly the classics, which, as is evident in the Romantics’ accounts of poetic training, had a long history of association with literary art.<sup>49</sup> Besant, for example, claimed that “he who would show the mysteries of action, thought, motive, and desire should first have studied in

the ancient schools” (‘Reade’s’ 200), and elsewhere writers from Thackeray to George Alfred Lawrence were praised for their scholarly knowledge.<sup>50</sup> Such knowledge was explicitly coded as masculine. Dorothy Mermin points out that

Boys’ studies, being considered more difficult, both demonstrated and developed their intellectual superiority to girls; and the ability to quote fragments of Greek and Latin that was all most of them retained from years of schooling reinforced class and gender identity by marking them definitively as gentlemen. They naturally wished to keep women out of the club ... and women ambitious for literary accomplishment, just as naturally, yearned to get in. (51)

With an assiduity bordering on obsession, male critics policed women’s classical errors. Their flair for locating mistakes is exemplified by a *Quarterly Review* article in which Eliot’s novels are said to have “traces of knowledge which is not usual among women (although some of the classical quotations might at least have been more correctly printed)” (cited in Showalter 95). As Eliot ironically pointed out in a letter to John Blackwood, “there happens to be only *one* classical quotation in them all” (cited in Showalter 95).

Indeed, writers who specifically mention any form of professional literary training, classical or not, tend to assume that it is a kind exclusive to men. Besant makes this point clear in his admiration of Reade’s professional qualifications:

He has approached Art ... in the truest spirit, that of a resolute student who knows that there is much to learn, but is conscious of his powers .... The preparation was manifold: in meditation about the quiet walks of Magdalene; in cultivated talk in the Fellows' Common Room; in life among books; in life among men; in studies of French books and of France. (204)

Clearly women writers could not access these professional institutions; nor were they, of course, believed to have to the appropriate (rational and intellectual) qualities to engage in such training. Even a critic like Lewes who was sympathetic to women writers argued that women's "grand function" of "Maternity" (rev. *Shirley* 161) left them unfitted for professional preparation: "how," he asks, can "such occupations" as motherhood "consort with the intense and unremitting studies which seared the eyeballs of Milton, and for a time unsettled even the powerful brain of Newton? High art and science always require the whole man; and never yield their great prizes but to the devotion of a life" (rev. *Shirley* 161). In other words, women's biological composition rendered them fundamentally unsuited for the rigours of professional training.

The gendering of literary professionalism is evident in other ways. We have seen how the prestige of occupational professionalism depends in large part upon the acquisition of professional knowledge. Nineteenth century critical discourse about women's writing accordingly endeavoured to control women's knowledge. As I described in the previous chapter, women

writers were encouraged to stage their fiction within a restricted sphere that reflected their supposed deficiency of worldly knowledge. The paragon against whom all women writers were compared was Jane Austen, who, as a critic for *Fraser's* said approvingly, “never attempts to describe a scene or a class of society with which she was not herself thoroughly acquainted. The conversations of ladies with ladies, or of ladies and gentlemen together, are given, but no instance occurs of a scene in which men only are present” (‘British Novelists’ 31). As Lewes makes clear in the article cited in Chapter One, in which Austen’s failure to transcend the realm represented by her “bit of ivory” is shown to exclude her from “the highest kind of genius,” this lack of worldly knowledge was, critical approval notwithstanding, implicitly believed to render women’s fiction second rate. Women who showed too much knowledge of the world, however—especially sexual knowledge, a field that is clearly related to the territory of ‘deep’ professional knowledge—risked being condemned as unwomanly. W. R. Greg’s portentous statement in an 1859 article titled ‘False Morality of Lady Novelists’ that “many of the saddest and deepest truths in the strange science of sexual affection are to her [women] mysteriously and mercifully veiled; and the knowledge of them can only be purchased at such a fearful cost, that we cannot wish it otherwise” (173) makes explicit the social barriers that confronted women writers who wished to explore this kind of subject matter.

Men, on the other hand, were supposed to benefit from their greater knowledge of the world. Most telling is their supposed expertise in the female self, which is consistent with the deep professional knowledge of the self theorised by Hughes. Women writers from Eliot to Sand were, not unexpectedly, routinely criticised for their inability to portray men: Swinburne claimed for Charlotte Brontë the exception that proved the rule, crediting her in 1877 with having invented the “only two male figures of wholly truthful workmanship and vitally heroic mould ever carved and coloured by a woman’s hand” (408) (other critics were not so generous), while the *Athenaeum* argued that “Ouida has one ruling idea of masculine conversation, which is, that it must be loose, and turn entirely on women, with occasional digressions upon wine and horses: it is imitation male talk—imitation manners—imitation cynicism, which is imitated from that traditional *répertoire*, ‘Rochefoucauld’s Maxims’” (rev. *Strathmore* 142). By contrast, male writers were often praised for their insight into female character. In fact, it was not uncommon to reserve the ability to portray female character entirely to men. As *Fraser’s* put it, “perhaps it is scarcely too much to say that only Mr. Thackeray and Mr. Charles Kingsley can draw ‘ladies’” (‘Novels of the Day ’ 211). Twenty years later, in a passage that explicitly delineates the nineteenth century belief in male expertise over the female self, Besant claimed that Charles Reade



invented the True Woman. That is to say, he was the first who found her. There have been plenty of sweet and charming women in stories—the patient, loving Amelia; the bouncing country girl, Sophy Western; the graceful and *gracieuses* ladies of Scott; the pretty dummies of Dickens; the insipid sweetnesses of Thackeray; the proper middle-class (or upper-class) girl of Trollope; the conventional girl of the better lady novelists. There have also been disagreeable girls, especially the bad-style, detestable girl of the ‘worsen’ lady novelists; but Reade—the *trouvère*—has found the real woman. (‘Reade’s’ 211)

Women are, after all, generally the objects, not the subjects, of the professional gaze.

Gender, then, was fundamentally implicated in the division between high and popular art. Gender was also, however, responsible for the inherent instability of this binary opposition. That is, the masculinised high art novel was constantly under threat from the novel’s troubling association with femininity. Mermin points out that “insofar as prose fiction examined domestic matters and the inner life, it ... was in the feminine domain” (46).<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the professional knowledge of the female self—necessary to control representation and maintain the binary opposition between high and popular art—simultaneously gave men dangerous insight into femininity that further undermines the binary opposition.<sup>52</sup> In addition, as Mermin adds, “[t]he novel did not have a long male tradition, as poetry did, to ward off feminine intrusion. There were more women novelists than women poets, and they took indisputably higher rank and were harder to ignore or explain away”

(46). The maintenance of the binary opposition between popular and serious art thus required rigorous policing.

The way in which Ouida's publishing history has been remembered offers insight into such policing. Eileen Bigland's 1950 biography (somewhat strangely, Monica Stirling's 1958 biography entirely omits any mention of her publishing history) offers a conventional account of Ouida's notorious dealings with her publishers. Bigland represents her as a shrew who torments her gentlemanly publishers with unreasonable demands. She describes, for example, how Ouida

adopted an extremely haughty manner towards publishers and editors. She dictated financial terms which took their breath away, drove them nearly crazy by demanding set after set of proofs for re-correction, and reduced them to a state of pulp by interfering in details of production and insisting that her own amateurish paintings should be reproduced on the covers of her books. (64)

In Bigland's view, Ouida "took an inordinate interest in every detail of [her] book[s'] production, from the paper and type-face to be used to the wording of all the advertisements, and had the most uncomfortable habit of wrangling over money" (108). Bigland portrays Ouida as a ridiculous tyrant, yet male authors like Henry James, or Honoré de Balzac (with whose obsessive editing of proofs Ouida compared her own habits (Bigland 163)), who express a similar interest in controlling the terms of their literary production have not been remembered in this manner. Indeed, as recent research by

Celia Phillips has uncovered, Ouida's publishers were hardly the gentlemanly figures that Bigland depicts. Phillips describes how Frederic Chapman, Ouida's first publisher, in at least one instance went behind her back with regard to her international publishing rights, sold titles that were not officially renewed in spite her requests for renewal, sold her copyrights to Chatto and Windus behind her back (she learned about this "from a note in the journal *Galvani*" ('Publishers' 213)), and evaded his contractual payment obligations. Despite a persistent belief that Ouida made huge profits from her novels that is again repeated in the recent biographical entry published in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, she was also underpaid.<sup>53</sup> Phillips concludes: "As a middle-class woman with no financial resources, [Ouida] was painfully vulnerable in the business world of that 'gentleman's' trade, publishing, and neither Frederic Chapman nor Andrew Chatto resisted the temptation to exploit her" ('Publishers' 215). Unlike other women writers such as George Eliot, Ouida did not even have a convenient male relative upon whom she could displace her business dealings. Clearly, more than simple vanity lies behind her compulsion to insist again and again in her letters to her publishers on her success and skill as a writer. Ouida's interest in controlling her literary production can, in light of the significance of the gendered rhetoric of professionalism to the construction of the high art novel, be viewed as a popular woman writer's

attempt to assert professional autonomy. The negative attention aroused by this fact suggests the intense anxiety aroused by such threats to the stability of the binary oppositions demarcating high and popular art.

This, therefore, was the cultural climate in which Ouida, a popular woman writer, sought to establish herself as a serious artist. Her novel *Tricotrin* can be read as an illuminating response to the boundaries within which high and popular art were becoming increasingly hierarchised during the late 1860s. The novel itself takes its name from its hero, a bohemian violinist who after being falsely accused by his aristocratic father of theft takes to wandering the countryside, playing to the peasants. He adopts an abandoned baby called Viva, who grows up to be a beautiful but somewhat thoughtless woman. Viva is saved from a life on the stage when an elderly aristocratic woman (the Duchesse de Lirà) takes her in. She soon gains inflated ideas about her heritage and is ungrateful to Tricotrin, who has fallen in love with her. After marrying the sickly son of her benefactor, who dies shortly after their marriage, she is established in the aristocratic world. Meanwhile, a haughty English aristocrat called Estmere (who is, it turns out, Tricotrin's half-brother) falls in love with her, believing her to be an aristocrat as well. However, a crisis occurs when it is discovered that Coriolis, the bewitching actress who tried to entice Viva onto the stage, is Viva's mother, and her secret is betrayed by Estmere's debased son,

Chanrellon. The novel ends with Viva first acknowledging the depth of Tricotrin's love after he suffers a fatal blow during a working class uprising, and then marrying Estmere.

Although ostensibly staged in a romanticised European setting, *Tricotrin* can be read as a thinly veiled response to contemporary conditions in the British literary marketplace. The novel at first appears to reproduce uncritically the division of the literary marketplace into a professionalised, masculine serious art and a feminised popular art. Tricotrin, a violinist with “the genius of a Mozart” (15), the “eloquence of a Mirabeau” (15) and the painting ability of (amongst others) Titian (64), is clearly intended as a representation of a professionalised masculine artist. Like the theorised professional artist in the *Westminster Review* essay on ‘The Profession of Literature,’ he adheres strictly to the professional service ethic, vigorously resisting aristocratic attempts to reimburse his playing—although, the novel makes it clear, his artworks are *worth* “untold gold” (63). His is a compassionate artistic mission, addressed to people who had their “senses to the beauty around” “dulled” by their “exceeding labour, infinite pain” and “pressure of hunger oftentimes,” and who “needed his music to raise their hearts from the earth that they tilled, to give them ears for the voices of winds and of waters, to translate to them the unknown tongues of the flowers” (430). This freedom from capitalist exchange, along with his

freedom from bourgeois society generally (a familiar aspect of nineteenth century French bohemianism, especially as represented by Sand) is additionally used by Ouida to stress Tricotrin's professional autonomy. Directed by the "joy" that he feels "at becoming his own law and his own leader" (506), Tricotrin declares, "I do not play for any wage, nor in any chateaux. I play when the spirit moves me; not when men dictate" (448). Tricotrin is also linked with professional intellect. He is a "ripe scholar" (122) and a philosopher who in the opening pages of the novel mystifies the peasant-woman Virelois with his display of literary and philosophical learning. Such professional knowledge is evident throughout the novel, particularly in his display of 'deep' psychological knowledge about Viva's feminine nature (like the male writers who supposedly represent femininity better than women, he tells Viva that "I know you better than you know yourself" (470)). From the opening scenes of the novel on, Tricotrin predicts that Viva's inborn female nature will lead her to wish she had been left to die in the forest, a prediction that ultimately seems to be realised when, near the end of the novel, Viva cries to Tricotrin, "If only you had left me to perish in my infancy!" (547).

Tricotrin is situated in opposition to Viva and Coriolis, who occupy the field of feminised, non-professional popular art. Although Viva is not an actress, her role in the aristocratic world closely resembles that of Coriolis.

The artisthood of each lies in her ability to transform her external self into an attractive surface to be looked at, lusted after, and purchased. Where Coriolis sells her body to an audience at the theatre, aristocratic women like Viva sell theirs to wealthy noblemen in marriage. The connection between the two is made explicit in the novel (indeed, Viva is irresistibly attracted to the stage and only narrowly escapes the life of an actress). In *Tricotrin*'s words:

I confess that the courtesan, who dances in the paint and tinsel of her wretched trade, is not in my sight much the inferior of you great ladies, who wed yourselves for gain, and intrigue for aggrandisement from your bridal to your death-hour. I am not sure, after all, that when I dissuaded you from entrance on an actress's career, I did not withhold you from the more honest, if the less lucrative, position of the two. (372)

Both the stage and the aristocratic world are linked with commodification and consumption. Viva's embodiment of the field of popular art is encapsulated by her irresistible attraction to the "artificial brilliancy" (140) of the stage, which, as Emily Allen points out, "appeared [to the Victorian public] to embody market forces at their most raw, offering the public spectacle of undisguised and unregulated consumption" (3). If *Strathmore* utilises the stage's link with gender transgression and performativity, in *Tricotrin* the stage is strongly associated with gaudy commodities: Coriolis in particular tries to tempt Viva with "silvered, painted, glittering bonbon boxes" (142) and "costume, jewels, lace, trailing skirts, everything" (177). The world of the aristocracy is even more one of intense consumerism than

the stage, a locus for “the indulgence of that intense passion for gorgeous display, sensuous pomp, and ever-varying distraction, which” Viva “never wearied of enjoying to its uttermost abandonment” (392):

Were some rare jewel on sale, at whose cost even princes hesitated, she purchased it; were some picture in the market at a fabulous price, she made it hers; were there some tropical flower rare beyond all others, she would spend thousands to add it to her conservatories; were some entertainment spoken of, which had been signalled by some unwonted thing, she would eclipse it with some marvel a hundredfold more beautiful, eccentric, or extravagant, furnishing converse for the world. (393)

The extravagant love of consumption depicted in this passage—a desire that is clearly focused less on the objects consumed than on the pleasure of the act of consumption itself—excludes her from the realm of professionalised high art that Tricotrin inhabits.

The professional/unprofessional divide between the two spheres of art represented by Tricotrin and Viva respectively is revealed by the way in which Tricotrin’s intellect is contrasted with Coriolis’s and Viva’s mindlessness. Viva, who has “little historic knowledge” and can only be said to have “caught up some stray gleams of classicisms from Tricotrin at intervals” (41), is confused when he quotes Latin, that classic signifier of professional literary training (419) (Coriolis, on the other hand, is simply “brainless” (61)). Tricotrin’s reason is also contrasted with Viva’s illogicality. In one episode, Viva is described “dropping, female-like” a



certain metaphor that she deploys in an argument with Tricotrin “so soon as she found it tell against her own argument” (38). Significantly, too, the fledgling language of popular art that characterised the response to sensation fiction is prominent in descriptions of both Viva and Coriolis. There is the same language of intoxication and glitter that connotes irrationality: Viva is attracted by the sight of actresses “intoxicating a multitude” (141), while the aristocratic world “turns” her “head dizzy like wine” (223) and she is “Intoxicated” with the “homage, applause, indulgence, pleasure” (336) that she receives there. Viva herself is a “glittering volatile thing” (335) whose beauty makes Estmere fear “her intoxicating charm” and “the scarlet flower of passion, ... of delirium, that glowed within her chest” (442); she commands her beauty to “dazzle, enchain, subdue, appeal, inflame, astonish, and subjugate at once” (359). Present, too, is an emphasis on Viva’s and Coriolis’s superficiality. In one passage, the narrator describes how

The works that appealed to the soul, the beatitudes and the martyrdoms of spiritual art, of divine aspiration, were dumb to her [Viva]; but the works that were full of fragrance, of colour, of splendour, of magnificent fancy—the works that appealed to the senses by the highest forms of sensuous beauty—filled her with a rapturous delight. (78)

In another exchange, Coriolis (who “lured” Viva with “specious words” (199)) assures her that talent is irrelevant to success on the stage: “Walk well, dress superbly, do strange things—the odder the better—and with your

features you can make your fortune, though you can say no more than a squeaking doll at a fair” (183). Finally, just as popular fiction was condemned by Victorian critics as ephemeral (again, a reflection of its supposed superficiality), the transience of Viva’s and Coriolis’s popularity is symbolised by the inevitable deterioration of the latter’s beauty:

time was stealing the elasticity from her limbs, the buoyancy from her spirit, the bloom from her skin, the gloss from her hair, the spontaneity from her laughter; and from such women as she Time robs all, and them brings nothing. She had her sceptre, indeed; but the passage of the years had loaded its ivory and gold with lead, and she began to grow tired of the incessant exertion which was needed to hold it in her own grasp, and prevent it from passing to the outstretched hands of her rivals. (396-7)

Viva, as Tricotrin reminds her, is not exempt from this process either: “Even from women as beautiful as you, time steals their charms; time brings satiety, lassitude, envy, and the disappointment of dead hopes; time confronts them with rivals, and takes the bloom from the cheeks” (371). The actress “once as brilliant ... as Coriolis” who lies forgotten in a maniacs’ asylum after “an accident that spoiled her beauty” (154) suffers a fate not dissimilar to the one Viva will face after “time like the sea” has eaten “away” at the “bright shores” of her “beauty” (372).

All this might appear to be a conventional gendering of high and popular art that, perhaps somewhat ironically, reproduces the same gendered binary oppositions that marginalised Ouida as a writer. In other words, Viva

and Coriolis are, like Victorian women writers more generally, linked with a debased popular art by their lack of professional qualities like rationality, autonomy and intellect while the novel's male artist, Tricotrin, is awarded the positive professional qualities associated with the incipient high art. However, Ouida's representation of the link between art, professionalism and gender is more subversive than it first appears. As I indicated in the Introduction, recognition of the subversiveness that lies behind Ouida's ostensibly conservative stance towards gender has gradually come to influence twentieth-century criticism of Ouida since Natalie Schroeder published her seminal 1988 essay. Schaffer's insightful reappraisal of Ouida's conservatism in "‘Nothing But Foolscape and Ink’: Inventing the New Woman' is particularly useful here. Briefly to repeat Schaffer's argument, Ouida's conservatism can be interpreted as a strategy that masks radical ideas. Specifically, Schaffer holds that, in her 1891 article 'The New Woman' in the *North American Review*, Ouida vigorously derides the New Woman in order to acquire acceptance for ideas that in fact closely resemble those that would come to be linked with this figure: that is, radical political action directed towards working class and animal rights.

*Tricotrin* reveals a similar pattern of ostensible adherence to dominant ideologies in order to disguise or authorise the way in which Ouida's views actually diverge from them. To begin with, various aspects of

Tricotrin's character suggest that Ouida wanted her readers to align her with him. Like Tricotrin, she had something of a bohemian reputation styled on that of George Sand. Jane Jordan points out that the gatherings that Ouida hosted at the Langham Hotel from 1866 to 1870, whose guests included Algernon Swinburne, G. J. Whyte-Melville, George Alfred Lawrence, Richard Monckton Milnes and Richard Burton, were "bohemian" (78) and "clearly modelled upon [the salon] of George Sand" (79). Smoking was encouraged, and although Ouida herself did not participate, her salon "acquired a notorious reputation" (Jordan 79). (Indeed, she was depicted smoking in a *Punch* cartoon for the 'Punch's Fancy Portraits' series in 1881 (Figure 1) and even featured in an advertisement depicting famous smokers for Cope's Tobaccos in 1876 (Jordan 79).)

Another quality that aligns Tricotrin with Ouida is his affinity with nature, which evokes her own rapturous celebration of nature in her life and works. Like Tricotrin—an Englishman who, not unlike Ouida, tends to be mistaken for a French national—Ouida also tried hard to cultivate a cosmopolitan image.<sup>54</sup> Ouida's simultaneous attempt to 'conceal' her personal life while doing her best to convince the public that she was an aristocrat might, indeed, be compared with the way in which Tricotrin's aristocratic birth makes itself felt by those around him despite his attempts to conceal his background. Even their very names align them—both Ouida and

Tricotrin have a “self-chosen title” (497), a single word pseudonym designed to function as a sort of encapsulation of their identities. Likewise, in the same way that “none knew anything for truth concerning his [Tricotrin’s] origin, his nation, or his history .... He was ‘Tricotrin;’ all was said in that” (52), Ouida insisted in letters to her publishers that she be called “no other name in Literature” (cited in Bigland 226) because “Ouida is all they [the public] have a right to know” (cited in Bigland 37).

Ouida’s alignment of herself with Tricotrin enables her to draw upon and modify her own bohemian reputation. The hero of her novel is clearly a rejoinder to the risqué bohemian reputation she had obtained amongst her critics. While Tricotrin “loved pleasure” and is accused by his many “censors” of having “deemed this too exclusively the only aim of life,” he also “loathed debauch” and is described extricating himself from the company of his fellow bohemians when it “glided in its riot to the latter” (65). More importantly, however, Ouida uses Tricotrin to align herself with the professionalism linked with the developing high art novel. Thus while the novel might seem to reproduce conventional gendered boundaries, these boundaries are unsettled by Ouida’s alignment of herself with a male, professionalised artist figure.



**Figure 1**

"O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden."—*Hamlet*, Act I., Scene 2.

(By Linley Sambourne.)

The novel's subversion of gender boundaries is more complex than this, however. Closer scrutiny reveals that the boundaries between high and popular art are surprisingly unstable in a way that opens a space for a popular

woman writer like Ouida to ally herself with high art. To begin with, she challenges the notion that professional literary autonomy is compromised by popularity. She achieves this by distinguishing (in a conception reminiscent of Wordsworth's own distinction between the "public" and the "people" in his 1815 'Essay, Supplementary to the Preface') between two versions of popularity—a debased consumerism in the "world" and a positive, consumer-free popularity amongst the "people." Tricotrin's pure artistic life amongst the peasantry contrasts with the desiring bodies of artists who capitulate to consumerism: "Not for him," the narrator says, "the feverish unrest of ambition, the carking thirst of the seekers of wealth, the vacillating hopes and fears of those whose breath is the breath of the world's applause" (52). Critical acclaim is associated with entrance into the commercial world and, significantly, *loss* of professional autonomy:

genius .... lives its own life; and is not, as you connoisseurs are given to fancy, wretched unless you see fit in your graciousness to deem it worth the glass case of your criticism, and the straw-stuffing of your gold. For it knows ... that stuffed birds nevermore use their wings, and are evermore subject to be bought and sold. (379)

In fact, critical acclaim, according to the narrator, actually destroys artistic talent:

Fortune ... has ... a curious habitude of changing ... the poverty of a painter's work-room, into costly couches, antique bronzes, ebony cabinets, eastern embroideries, picturesque colour, and luxurious ease, but ... not unfrequently turns out with the old rubbish a

witchstone that she found there, called genius. Critics and connoisseurs rarely, however, detect its absence. (374-5)

By redefining commercial success as success amongst the critical establishment, Ouida cleverly places Tricotrin (and, by implication, herself) outside literary consumerism and inside the boundaries of high art. Negative critical reviews and her image as a literary scamp (analogous with Tricotrin, who, for example, is misjudged by Estmere as “a great rogue” (117)) become signs of her true literary worth. Even the frequent accusations levelled at Tricotrin for wasting his genius are reminiscent of Victorian critics’ exasperation at Ouida’s squandering of her obvious talent.<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, if Tricotrin does not (as we have seen writers after the 1860s increasingly do) produce artworks that can only be understood by the few who have the appropriate professional knowledge, he retains the link with mystified professional knowledge by using his artworks to *interpret* such knowledge for the people. His job is to hear “in marvellous poems” “all that duller ears heard but dimly in the splash and surge of the brown-covered stream” and translate it “into clearer tongue” (3). In doing so, he preserves his distance from the people at the same time that he inspires universal adoration. As the narrator says, “He was not wholly of them—that even the peasantry felt; but he was *with* them heart and soul, and they loved him better for that nameless difference, that intangible unlikeness, which made them, while he toiled



among them and feasted among them, yet perceive a royalty in him that he never lost” (52). In this way, Tricotrin enables Ouida to navigate the insoluble fact of her huge readership *and* the newly problematic nature of popularity.

Equally crucial to Ouida’s challenge to the binary oppositions that structure high and popular art is her creation of a high art that includes feminine qualities. While Tricotrin is distinguished from Viva and Coriolis by his professional rationality, as discussed above, Ouida also argues for the centrality of emotionality, instinct and naturalness—qualities that were, as we have seen, increasingly associated with the unprofessional, feminised popular novel. Like the female writer who was imagined to write instinctively, Tricotrin creates “in the caprice of free impulse” (64) and his emotional life is central to the production of his art:

Laughing like some troop of revellers, sobbing like some life worn out by pain, rich as a carol of choristers’ voices, sad as the moaning of winds through the sea-pines, the music followed his will, as the souls that he moves follow the moods of a great poet, who wakes tears or raillery at his wish, and reaches now to heaven, and penetrates now into the darkness of hell. (21)

Emotional response on the part of the audience is also central to Ouida’s feminised aesthetic. Indeed, the emotional effect that Tricotrin’s music has on his audience closely resembles the language of intoxication associated with popular art. In one episode, the narrator describes how “men and

women went mad with the joyous delirium of motion .... They lost all sense save that one sense of the hot intoxicated delight of boundless, leaping, whirling, spinning, unceasing motion; like the whirlwind in its speed, like brandy in its strength, like tiger's frolic in its play" (276). Popular art, meanwhile, is associated with *lack* of emotion. It is not sentimentality that marks Coriolis as an inferior artist, but the fact that as an actress she trades in the representation of what she does "not feel" (156). This lack of feeling also characterises the aristocratic world in which Viva peddles her own brand of popular art. As Estmere notes, Viva's beauty is marred only by the fact that she lacks feeling (363). This lack of feeling is encapsulated by the cool commercial exchange that represents her marriage with de Lira: regarding love as a "thing so easily won with a careless smile" (356) and "so easy to retain by an indolent word" (356-7), she holds "it in scorn, like all things cheaply purchased" (357) and treats it with "gay, languid, light contempt" (356).

Ouida treats emotionality and rationality as qualities that should coexist in high art, not cancel each other out. Significantly, she challenges the critical body that sees disinterested rationality as the proper response to art and champions the emotionality of the 'people' who constitute her popular audience. This debate is played out between Tricotrín, the principal embodiment of Ouida's own aesthetic, on one hand, and Estmere, who

functions as a representative of the 'world' that Ouida aligns with the critical establishment, on the other:

'But will you only play for the peasantry or for the populace?' asked Estmere .... '... no ignorant mind, no untrained ear, can appreciate melodies as perfect as yours seems to be.'

'Can an ignorant or an untrained brain follow the theory of light, or the metamorphosis of plants? Yet it may rejoice in the rays of a summer sun, in the scent of a nest of wild-flowers. So may it do in my music ....'

Estmere looked at him with an increasing interest.

'A noble answer,' he said with a bend of his haughty head. 'But still, despite this, you must sometimes desire a more appreciative audience.'

'Appreciative! O-hé! how shall we call that? There are many kinds of appreciation. The man of science appreciates when he marvels before the exquisite structure of the sea-shell, the perfect organism of the flower; but the young girl appreciates too when she holds the shell to her ear for its music, when she kisses the flower for its fragrance. Appreciation! it is an affair of the reason, indeed; but it is an affair of the emotions also.'

'And you always prefer what is born of the latter?'

'Not always; but for my music I do. It speaks in an unknown tongue. Science may have its alphabet, but it is feeling that translates its poems.' (432)

Clearly, pure emotionality is better than pure reason; the "wine-shop audience" that "feels!" (438) surpasses the professionalised connoisseurship of the "vapid circle of a palace drawing-room, murmuring scientific jargon, and tapping faint applause with fans and gloves" (439). Yet, as vital as emotionality is seen to be, if a great artist like Tricotrin is to be produced, rather than just a nobly appreciative but unsophisticated audience, emotionality must be unified with reason. Tricotrin is a man of

“philosophies” *and* “instincts alike” (211); he is the embodiment of an ideal union of mind and emotion who through “the infinitude of sympathy attains to the infinitude of comprehension” (313). Tricotrin, then, is a surprisingly subversive character who embraces a feminisation of writing that those interested in the development of high art sought to erase.

Ouida’s critique of men’s attempt to claim the high art novel exclusively for themselves extends to a sly undercutting of the ‘deep’ professional knowledge that, as I have discussed, was designed to endow men with the entire burden of representation and exclude women from serious art. It is consequently apparent that her attitude towards Viva and Tricotrin is much more ambivalent than her identification with Tricotrin at first suggests. While it is certainly clear that Tricotrin is generally meant as a positive character whom the reader is intended to admire and align with Ouida herself, in some ways he simultaneously comes under critique as the bearer of male artistic status. Significantly, the reverence that Virelois and the rest of the peasantry have for Tricotrin is based rather more on ignorance than the quality of his professional knowledge. In the opening pages of the novel, for example, Virelois concludes that Tricotrin’s rhetoric “must be wisdom by a rule that often actuates the world’s acceptance of unproved sagacity—namely, that it was completely unintelligible” (20). Ouida seems here to be satirising the mystification of knowledge that, as I have argued,

characterises the ideology of occupational professionalism that was increasingly shaping the high art novel. The unreliability of the novel's characters' testimony to Tricotrin's professional knowledge is made further evident by the fact that Virelois and the other peasants believe, superstitiously, that Tricotrin is "a Wandering Jew, could turn dead leaves into gold at pleasure, could heal the sick and smite the healthy, call down storms and call up whirlwinds, become invisible and be always omniscient" (20). Indeed, closer scrutiny of Tricotrin's professional male knowledge itself reveals hints of satire. If we look a little closer at the opening pages of the novel, we see that this exposition of professional knowledge is in fact an exhortation for Viva to commit suicide:

'What is it, good Tricotrin?' she [Virelois] asked ....  
 'A Waif and Stray,' answered Tricotrin. 'Whether from Mary Magdalene or Madame la Marquise is unknown, probably will never be known. Curses go home to roost, but chickens don't. The Waif is irrational; she thinks a mouthful of black bread better than easy extinction among the ferns.' (8)

Furthermore, while the prophecy that Viva will one day wish she had been left to die in the forest may ostensibly come true, its resolution is rather hollow. After all, by the end of the novel the daughter of the debased actress is elevated to a Duchess and about to marry the noble Estmere in a union of true love (we presume that his attempt to forgive her succeeds). It is *Tricotrin* who dies with his love for Viva unfulfilled. Tricotrin's professional

knowledge fails even more spectacularly elsewhere in the novel. In imagining Viva “happy” with her modest life (like the Victorian patriarchy that imagined a restricted domestic life to be fulfilment enough for all women), he is, as the narrator says, “blind, and believed that which he wished to believe” (140). Tricotrin’s failure to apprehend Viva’s true feelings results, as he is forced to admit, in her nearly being seduced into a life on the stage.

By undermining Tricotrin’s artistic professionalism in this way, Ouida rejects the gendered boundaries that excluded women from serious art. Thus, resisting the modest, homely type of fiction in which women writers were supposed to engage, Viva elects, “as millions wiser have chosen, to turn her face aside from duty” (179) in favour of artistic success elsewhere:

To be one of those who ‘sat at their lattices’ in the quietude of an humble home, while the great pageantry of life swept on below her window, with no place in its carnival crowds for her, no voice of hers in its laughter, no banner amid its proud standards upheld by her hand, was the future that she feared with a passionate terror. (178)

Viva’s dissatisfaction with the limited artistic goals offered to women is poignantly evoked when she begs Tricotrin to take her with him on his travels:

‘How I should love to roam like that!’ she cried.  
He smiled a little sadly.  
‘Impatient bird, to long to quit the nest ....’  
‘But you roam!’  
‘Certainly I do. But I am not a woman.’

‘A woman! Because one will be a woman must one never see the world?’

The words were petulant and longing. (48)

While it may seem that only popular art is a viable choice for Viva, she longs, nonetheless, to achieve true greatness. When Coriolis tells Viva that she need not have talent if she only look beautiful, Viva, “dissatisfied with her future prospects,” responds, “But I want to be *great*” (183). Coriolis’s response, in which a dichotomy is set up between those like her who relish having “more gold than we can take up in both our hands” and “Some Latin idiot” who “says ... that the ‘pointing finger’ is no sure sign we are great” (183) (note the allusion to the masculine field of scholarship implied by the reference to Latin), suggests that the terms of greatness being represented here are those that form the difference between professionalised high art and debased popular art.

In the end, Viva’s desire is shown to be viable. *Tricotrin*, I argue, enacts a kind of symbolic reversal in which the male artist gives way to the serious female artist. This is resonant because, while Ouida may ostensibly align herself with Tricotrin, her very public reputation simultaneously and irresistibly connects her with Viva, the popular woman artist. Indeed, if Ouida has affinity with Tricotrin, Viva and Tricotrin are also inextricably connected, at once opposite and alike. The very title of the novel—in full, *Tricotrin: The Story of a Waif and Stray*—implies a merging of the two

characters. When Tricotrin first discovers Viva, he is at once “moved ... with a certain sympathy for her” (21) aroused by an awareness of their affinity. As indicated above by Viva’s plea to “Let me roam too” (48), both she Tricotrin are also attracted to the nomadic lifestyle (like Tricotrin, Viva is described as a “bohemian” (522)). There is a chain, therefore, connecting Ouida to Tricotrin to Viva (and ultimately Coriolis), a progression that itself suggests fluidity between the boundaries of high and popular art, masculine and feminine.<sup>56</sup>

As the shadow of Ouida’s own self, Viva is purged and allowed to assume Tricotrin’s place as high artist, while Tricotrin’s own professionalism is concomitantly corrupted as he falls in love with Viva during the course of the novel and drawn irresistibly out of the professional’s service ethic and into the world of commodity exchange. In one episode early in the novel, he sells Estmere his precious edition of Dante’s works, illustrated by the fifteenth-century Italian miniaturist Attavante Degli Attavanti, in order to raise money to buy Viva gifts. Tricotrin’s embarrassment at the exchange is evident: throughout the episode, he is defensive and edgy, alternately “flushed red” (120) and pacing “up and down the terrace with restless uneven steps” (121). Later in the novel, as he and the de Liràs negotiate Viva’s future, Tricotrin is again implicated in the sale and purchase of an object. The reader is left in no doubt about the commercial nature of their



exchange as Madame de Lirà inspects Viva like a piece of china, looking for a “flaw” (159), and regards Tricotrin’s “Waif” as a thing that she has “purchased from him” (237). While “It stings” Tricotrin “to hear” Viva “spoken of as a thing to be bartered in” (161), he nonetheless accepts their “offer” (200) and prepares himself for the “loss” it will be to “the only one who hitherto had set any value on her” (202). Indeed, Tricotrin grows “to hate his love for” Viva as it is warped into an “instinct of jealous possession” (216). This comment is particularly significant given the important role that love plays in *Tricotrin*. Near the beginning of the novel, Tricotrin’s art is explicitly shown to originate in love, a quality that belongs to the emotional landscape that is central to art in Ouida’s aesthetic. In one episode, for example, he sees “such pictures, such poems, as he best loved to fill his sight, and his heart, and his memory with; such as seen, and felt, and treasured, with the true instinct of pure love, had made his life itself the poem and the picture that it was” (55). (Viva, on the other hand, is “too radiantly self-engrossed” to survey landscapes with “any poet’s deep inborn delight” (75).) The distortion of Tricotrin’s love for Viva is thus, logically, a distortion of the purity of his artistic instincts.

Eventually, Tricotrin’s desire for Viva destroys him. In his preoccupation with her he forgets “the people” (556), his true audience, who in his absence are overcome with terrible emotion (the “lust to slay” (559))

and begin to revolt. Attempting to placate them, he is killed when a man “drunk with the passions of the hour” (562) hurls a block of granite at him. Where Tricotrin is destroyed, however, Viva in a sense takes his place as high artist. Significantly, the narrator makes it clear that, for all that it is debased by her equally inborn love of consumption, she retains an “imperishable” sense of “artistic feeling” from her childhood:

All that she did was done in an exquisite harmony, refinement, and elegance of taste; because there was in her that innate sense of fitness, and of beauty, which had in her childhood made every coarse tone, or motley hue, irritating and painful to her; and which had led her, unconsciously, to arrange her very wild flowers in blending colours that would have charmed a painter’s love of pure and sympathetic tones. (392)

Estmere recognises that Viva has genuine artistic qualities that are obscured by her way of living and wonders how “a woman with so much poetry in her face” can “be as utterly given over to the vanities, the artifices, and the egotism of her world, as the whole tenor of her life, acts, and words would lead one to infer?” (389). As he asks himself, “how fair and sweet a nature might wake into life if she loved?” (388). Indeed, when Estmere comments that Viva only lacks “Feeling” to be “perfect” (363), it immediately begs the question: if she were to gain true feeling, the emotional quality that above all others is for Ouida linked with high art, would she then be a high artist?

Estmere is the impetus who does indeed revivify Viva’s emotions. The difference between Estmere’s love and the superficial consumer desire

of ‘the world’ to which Viva is initially attracted is signalled in a number of ways. In contrast with her facile instant success with her previous admirers, Viva must work to obtain Estmere’s love. He is at first immune to the surface beauty that attracts others and criticises Viva for living “only for herself” (363); his love only begins to grow when he observes what he believes is her empathy for others. In actuality, Estmere is initially deceived about the quality of Viva’s empathy (she is not so loyal to Tricotrin that she will admit to their relationship), but he is right to see her artistic potential. When she is exposed as a foundling and forcibly expelled from the aristocratic world, the “truth and courage” that have “so long been dead” are “revived” in her “soul” (553). She recovers from the addiction of consumer culture (the “long opium-sleep of deep-drugged vanity” (480)) and loves Estmere with the “vivid force” (480) of genuine emotion. Viva’s love for Tricotrin is also purified: as she says, “Yes, my love is great, now” (553). Viva’s attainment of greatness here resonates with her earlier dialogue with Coriolis, in which her desire to be great signalled her wish to align herself with professionalised high art.

Rather than simply reproducing conservative Victorian gender ideology, in *Tricotrin* Ouida provides, therefore, a complex intervention into the gendered hierarchy structuring the developing divide between high and popular art. Written at a moment when the gap between high and popular art

was becoming increasingly important, the novel responds to the way in which professional ideology was being deployed to award male writers the chance to achieve recognition as serious artists at the same time that it marginalised women writers. Ouida aligns herself with the professionalised serious artist while simultaneously critiquing the way in which the developing ideology of literary professionalism excluded women, conceptualising instead a model of high art that values femininity and feminine qualities. This sensitivity to changes in the way in which fiction was oriented to art during this period was, as my next chapter will show, not misplaced. Indeed, the incipient split between high and popular art that was driven by the success of sensation fiction in the 1860s signals the beginning of more extensive change to the way in which the serious novel was imagined and received, change to which Ouida in turn responded with an ever critical eye.

### Chapter 3: Women, Realism and *Friendship*

In Chapter One, I discussed Ouida's challenge to the way in which the gendering of mid-Victorian authorship made women's writing seem less serious artistically. This chapter is in many ways an expansion of the more general argument presented there, specifically focusing instead on the way in which the gendering of authorship in the context of realism disadvantaged women writers. As I argued earlier, realism was considered to be uniquely suited to women's supposedly limited talents, inducing women writers like Ouida to reject it in favour of more sensational plots. I now explore the way in which, at the same time that Ouida was criticised for not conforming to realist tenets, she was fundamentally unable to acquire the artistic prestige that male authors derived from mid-Victorian realism. I focus on her 1878 novel *Friendship*, which was written at a moment when the realist aesthetic favoured by the critical press at the mid-century was beginning to be threatened by a younger, more artistically self-conscious generation of writers. At this moment, Ouida was provided with an opportunity to renegotiate the aesthetic of the serious novel in a way that incorporated femininity, and the feminine writer, much more positively. In *Friendship*, she consequently attempts both to correct the realist critique of her novels and to explore the possibility of an alternative, feminine novelistic aesthetic.

As I have just suggested, *Friendship* was written in 1878 in response to early signs that the realist aesthetic that had dominated the mid-Victorian novel was being eroded. Ouida had good reason to be interested in the transition away from realism. For all of the mid-century, it had been easily the most prestigious style available to writers of fiction—the style against which all writers of fiction were measured—and her reputation had suffered badly from this literary climate. Her portrayal of character, geography and natural history, her extravagant plots and her depiction of high society were all sources of regular critical ridicule. A sample of reviews of her work readily illustrates this. Comments range from the *Athenaeum*'s pronouncement in 1865 that Ouida's "pictures of life and character are to real life and honest daylight what highly coloured *études en pastel* are to works of genuine Art" (rev. *Strathmore* 142), to, in 1866, the *London Review*'s judgment that *Chandos* was "unreal and absurd from beginning to end" (rev. *Chandos* 707). Review after review continues this theme throughout the 1870s and 1880s. In an article on 'Ouida's Novels' in 1873 for the *Contemporary Review*, Murray Vincent states that "Ouida's puppets remind one forcibly of Madame Tussaud's waxwork collection" in that "they have the same ghastly resemblance to life; but it is a resemblance by which Nature is mocked and insulted" (922). Similarly, in 1877, the *Academy* claimed that Ouida's fiction was characterised by "men and women who

enjoy the blessed peculiarity of being not in the least like the men and women of this wicked but commonplace world—men and women of beauty, intellect, wealth, wickedness—everything in short that is desirable, and all in degree quite unattainable by those who are unlucky enough to have had not Ouida but another than she for creator” (rev. *Ariadne* 530-1). Again, in 1883, the *Spectator* declared that Ouida “has the enormous advantage over her rivals in fiction that she can invent at her pleasure worlds quite different from those in which others are constrained to move,” adding that “The number of possible—but why should we say ‘possible?’—combinations thus becomes unlimited” (rev. *Wanda* 745). One could easily go on. Indeed, identifying what the *Athenaeum* described as Ouida’s failure “in matters of ordinary observation” (‘Wanda’ 699) became a virtual obsession with reviewers, to the degree that some reviews of her novels consist of little more than a detailed catalogue of her errors.

Ouida strongly resented such attacks and repeatedly insisted on the verisimilitude of her fiction. In April of 1880, she wrote a letter to the *Times*, challenging its claim that the “pictures of society” in her novel *Moths* “are exaggerated and over-charged.” Her letter gives a detailed defence of the novel’s realism, emphasising its basis in real life: she states, for example, that, although verification of *Moths*’s “exactitude” is hampered by “the laws of libel and the unwritten laws of courtesy alike,” she has, “indeed, described

nothing that I have not seen” (5). Later that year, she responded again to a reviewer’s attack on her realism, this time in the *Athenaeum*. Following a review of her novel *Wanda* in that publication—a fairly typical critique that sardonically detailed the novel’s impossibilities—Ouida immediately wrote “to suggest that the ignorance of a ‘reviewer’ should not be allowed so to ride rampant in your columns.” She again vigorously defends the realism of her novel, detailing the factuality of her representation of divorce law, natural history and geography. Her frustration at this kind of critical attack is plainly evident at the end of her letter, in which she recalls similar attacks on her earlier novel *In Maremma* and takes the opportunity to suggest

that your columns would gain in value if some attempt were made by those who write for you to bring some effort at analysis, comprehension, intelligent discussion to their work, instead of the very cheap and unintelligent method of supposing that everything which they do not know themselves is necessarily error on the part of the author whose work they are perusing. (699)

As this passage shows, Ouida believed critical attacks on her novels’ realism to be grossly unjustified and was exasperated at the refusal of the critical community to take her fiction seriously.

Ouida’s most detailed exposition of her position on realism is a long letter to the *Times* titled ‘Romance and Realism’ that ran in October 1883 and was republished the same year in the collection *Frescoes*. In this letter, Ouida acknowledges that “You have, I believe, sometimes accused me of



writing ‘fairy stories’” and takes the opportunity vigorously to defend the realism of her fiction. The letter opens with the story of a “Genoese gentleman” who is jilted by his lover, a “cantatrice of obscure position.” After learning of his lover’s infidelity, the gentleman attempts to “provoke” his rival, “a young noble of the neighbourhood,” into a duel. When the Carabineers intervene, depriving him “of his just vengeance,” the “madness of his despair and agony” compels him to shoot himself “by the river’s side, while his faithless mistress jeered at him from her open window in the lovely stillness of the moonlit September eve.” This story, Ouida insists, is not only “the absolute truth”—the events in question took place “but a few nights ago” and the Genoese gentleman “still lies in great peril in a cottage near where he fell”—but “is only one out of a thousand tragedies which yearly occur in this, the home of Romeo and Giuliette, where love is not a dead letter” (3). This Italian story of passionate love and tragedy is, of course, deliberately reminiscent of Ouida’s own fiction, of which fatal love affairs, cruel lovers and unflinching, pure devotion were characteristic features. Her strategy in telling it to the readers of the *Times* is clearly to underscore the truth of the passionate men and women in her novels.

Ouida continues her letter by defending the truthfulness of her novels’ portrayal of high society and attacking critics who impugn it. She cites “A lecturer in the north of England” who, “lecturing on my novels,

remarked with *naïveté* and incredulity on the number of residences assigned in ‘Moths’ to Prince Zouroff.” Had, she says, “the lecturer taken the trouble to inquire of anyone conversant with the world he would have learned that most great persons of all nationalities have three or four different residences at the least, and that a Russian noble is invariably extravagant in these matters” (4). Ouida not only defends her portrayal of high society, however, but argues that such subject matter should be included in a properly representative realism. First stating that “if there be one thing more than another that is the most conspicuous note of our century, it is the number of great fortunes which are possessed in it” and “the extreme luxury and splendour of life in general,” she then argues that “To describe riches in a novel is surely therefore as legitimate as to describe middle-class competence, or the harshness of absolute poverty,” for “the former has quite as much effect on the times as the latter, and infinitely more effect on the manners” (3). Moreover, Ouida insists, the refusal of “English literature” to acknowledge the “influences of the Second Empire” over contemporary Europe is necessarily to portray an inaccurate picture of the world. After all, she concludes, “The world is not exclusively composed of the English middle class, varied with a few American young ladies” (4). Not only, then, does Ouida claim that the aristocratic subject matter in her fiction is faithfully portrayed, but she contends that if such subject matter is excluded

from the compass of British realism, the latter cannot be considered to portray life accurately.

Clearly, then, Ouida believed that her fiction deserved to be taken seriously by realist critics. It is, of course, easy to dismiss her fiction as too extravagant ever to be seriously read as realist, and it would be naïve to assert that criticisms of her flamboyant style had no legitimate basis. Yet the response in the critical press upon the discovery of her gender is telling. While there were certainly reviewers in the early 1860s who criticised Ouida's realism, the discovery that she was a woman does seem to have particularly galvanised criticisms of her hopeless inability to portray life. Although some earlier reviewers, such as the author of the *Athenaeum*'s 1865 review of *Chandos*, had assumed she was a woman, the question of Ouida's gender was finally settled in the 1866 review of *Chandos* in the *Westminster Review*, which declared that, "we have been assured, on excellent authority, that 'Ouida' is a woman" (525). It does not seem coincidental that this article was largely devoted to detailing "the author's capacity for ignorance" (525) and was by far the most explicit denunciation of her realism that had yet been made. Amongst other things, the reviewer deems her "attempts to paint high life and low life ... equally unsuccessful"; lists "the author's capacity for ignorance" in "ornithology" as well as her "botanical blunders" (525); and ridicules her characters, who "act stranger"

(526) still than her birds and trees. This juxtaposition of the question of gender with an analysis of her failure at realism suggests that gender was, in fact, an element in these kinds of critical denunciations.

The link between gender and realism is even more striking in the history of critical ridicule of Ouida's attempts realistically to portray men. I noted this aspect of the critical response to her novels in the previous chapter, where I quoted from an *Athenaeum* review that describes Ouida's depictions of men as a series of imitations derived from "that traditional *répertoire*, 'Rochefoucauld's Maxims.'" Such criticisms of course occur elsewhere. In 1869, for example, the *Contemporary Review* mocked her attempts to describe masculinity, stating that "One dominant desire is amusingly evident in 'Ouida'—the wish to be thought to understand men precisely in that side of their character which to a woman is so unintelligible, their relations with one another" (rev. *Strathmore* 305). Likewise, in 1873, the *Examiner* said of the hero of her novel *Pascarel* that, "Of course, like all Ouida's men, he is an unnatural creation" (rev. *Pascarel* 336). These kinds of attacks are telling, given that before being outed as a woman Ouida successfully wrote tales of military life for the pre-eminently masculine *The British Army and Navy Review*. According to Hager Ben Driss, *Under Two Flags*, which was first serialised in that publication, had "a faithful military readership" (170): these men, at least, did not lightly dismiss Ouida's

portrayal of masculine life as an amusing display of ignorance. Reviewers, too, found no reason to question Ouida's gender in the early years of her career. Thomas Arnold, writing for *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1866, finds her to be representative of "the inconceivable amount of harm which the narrowness and dulness of our public school and college education is doing to the minds and characters of our young men" (206), and describes her as one of the "clever and wilful men" who "vote Latin and Greek a nuisance" in favour of "the education given by 'the world'" (206). Given the mocking attacks on her ability to portray masculine life that suddenly emerged upon the discovery that she was a woman, it seems inescapable that such criticisms of her realism were entangled in certain assumptions about gender. A closer look at the way in which women fared in realist criticism lends greater support for this claim.

Women's marginalisation in critical discourse about realism is not something that has attracted a great deal of critical attention, although realism itself has received a good deal of bad press from feminist critics over the course of the twentieth century. These critics have been primarily interested in the way in which the content of realism marginalises women. For example, it has been claimed that realism naturalises ideology that marginalises women. Arguments in this vein are mostly variations on the work of Catherine Belsey, who herself borrows from the work of critics of

realism like Colin MacCabe, Terry Eagleton and Roland Barthes.<sup>57</sup> Exploring how some women “collud[e] ... with the patriarchal values and assumptions prevalent in our society” (‘Constructing’ 45), Belsey argues that “[c]lassic realism .... performs ... the work of ideology” (51) by inviting the reader “to perceive and judge the ‘truth’ of the text, the coherent non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation” (52). This process is “the guarantee not only of the truth of the text but of the reader’s existence as an autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects” (52), and, Belsey concludes, “[i]n this way classic realism constitutes an ideological practice in addressing itself to readers as subjects, interpellating them in order that they freely accept their subjectivity and their subjection” (52-3). Following Belsey, feminists like Jeanie Forte and Elin Diamond have put forward similar arguments regarding realism’s capacity to naturalise patriarchal ideology.<sup>58</sup> Another feminist criticism of realism has been advanced by theorists of *écriture féminine* like Hélène Cixous, who propose a non-linear writing of the body that, they argue, more accurately reflects feminine reality. The notion that realism ignores the feminine body has also been taken up in a slightly different vein by feminist critics working in the field of theatre (which has perhaps been the main field for feminist criticism of literary realism), who have argued that realism is shaped by

masculine sexuality. According to psychoanalytic critics like Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio, realism is structured by “a phallic mimetic mode in which the three phases of erection, climax, and detumescence are deemed essential to obtain narrative order” (31).<sup>59</sup> Anderlini-D'Onofrio's reference to the procurement of “narrative order” is telling here: again, what Belsey calls “the coherent non-contradictory interpretation of the world” is described as a front for the way that the realist text is structured along masculine lines.

As I have already suggested, the manner in which the authority of realist representation, as a serious novelistic genre, was awarded principally to men in the critical discourse about realism is an aspect of realism's gendering that has received comparatively less critical attention. We can explore this in the context of Ouida and the mid-nineteenth century by looking more closely at the claim that women writers' skill at recording detail rendered them especially suited to realism. I noted in Chapter One that women were believed to be adept at the close observation that made them accurate recorders of detail. Femininity and the detail are, indeed, intimately connected, an argument that has been made by Naomi Schor in *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*, a text that ranges from Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* in the second half of the eighteenth century to the twentieth century American sculptor Duane Hanson. According to Schor, “[t]he detail does not occupy a conceptual space beyond the laws of sexual

difference: the detail is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine” (4). Attending specifically to nineteenth century Britain, Pykett similarly notes the connection between femininity and realism’s attention to detail: “[l]ike the proper feminine, the improper feminine was also defined in terms of an over-reliance on detail” (27). While details were, and are, an acknowledged part of nineteenth century realism (George Levine identifies a “preoccupation with surfaces, things, particularities, social manners” as one of realism’s “primary conventions” (15)), in the mid-nineteenth century this recognition simultaneously jostled with an awareness of the existence of a wider historical or human truth—often, but not always, a beautiful one—that transcended mere detail. This tension between what we might label mimeticism on one hand and idealism on the other has been noticed by contemporary commentators on realism. Levine, for example, argues that, “realistic method proceeds to what is not visible—the principles of order and meaning—through the visible” and sees in realism “a tension between imagination (with the faculty of reason, as well) and reality” (18). Likewise, Katherine Kearns states that realism “cannot afford to go either to the extreme of idealism—Truth in the Platonic sense—or to that of positivism—Truth as a finite condition to be reached through accumulation of all relevant detail” (10). Although using different vocabularies, both Levine and Kearns



recognise the tension in realism between two kinds of truths, each possessing its own ‘reality.’

The Victorians, too, were profoundly aware of the need to reconcile both of these elements. Levine notices that in “the criticism that attached to realism from the start, we find recurring objections to what Hardy was later to attack as mere ‘copyism’” (10). George Henry Lewes was particularly alert to this problem, and his classic essay ‘Realism in Art: Recent German Fiction,’ written for the *Westminster Review* in 1858, is an elegant explication of it. Objecting to “peasants with regular features and irreproachable linen” and “milkmaids ... whose costume is picturesque, and never old and dirty,” Lewes urges artists accurately to observe the outside world: “either paint no drapery at all, or paint it with the utmost fidelity; either keep your people silent, or make them speak the idiom of their class” (493). At the same time, he recognises that close observation alone is insufficient. He proposes two paintings of a “village group” by “two men equally gifted with the perceptive powers and technical skill necessary to the accurate representation of a village group, but the one to be gifted, over and above these qualities, with an emotional sensibility which leads him to sympathize intensely with the emotions playing amid that village group.” While both artists will “lovingly depict the scene and scenery,” he argues, the second artist “will not be satisfied therewith,” but will

express something of the emotional life of the group; the mother in his picture will not only hold her child in a graceful attitude, she will look at it with a mother's tenderness; the lovers will be tender; the old people venerable. Without once departing from strict reality, he will have thrown a sentiment into his group which every spectator will recognise as poetry. Is he not more *real* than a Teniers, who, admirable in externals, had little or no sympathy with the internal life, which, however, is as real as the other? (494)

For Lewes, then, accurate empirical observation, while absolutely essential, must be supplemented with a sensibility that enables the artist to see beyond the mere factual detail. It is this that elevates art into "poetry."

A similar idea is expressed by George Meredith in an 1864 letter to the Reverend Augustus Jessopp, in which he argues that "Realism" (by which he means something more like strict mimeticism) "is the basis of good composition" and necessary if an artwork is to supply more "amusement" (cited in Skilton 88) than can be found "in a Kaleidoscope" (cited in Skilton 89). However, Meredith says, a "great genius" will supply something more: men like Shakespeare and Goethe, "to whom I bow my head ... are Realists au fond," but while "They give us Earth, it is earth with an atmosphere" (cited in Skilton 88). Strict mimeticism is appropriate for "Little writers," who "should be realistic" because "They would then at least do solid work" (cited in Skilton 88). Like Lewes, Meredith argues that making contact with human life or reality involves more than simply factual representation,

requiring instead the ability to depict the “atmosphere” that escapes mere factual observation.

It is precisely this kind of idealising sensibility that women writers were imagined to lack. Their inability to transcend the detail meant that, as Pykett shows, “feminine realism was repeatedly defined as a lack,” a “representation of surfaces” (26). Women’s powers were believed to be curtailed by their lack of imaginative ability, worldliness and intellectual power. Pykett cites, for example, an 1860 *Fraser’s Magazine* article that discusses how, “[w]omen’s superior powers of observation were ... crucially limited by the fact that they ‘can describe, or rather transcribe with success only those scenes and characters which come under their observation’” (26). Women’s limitations are similarly outlined in an 1855 essay for the *National Review* by Walter Bagehot, who argues that, “As Dutch paintings of the highest imitative perfection soon weary because the mind cannot rest long on a mere lesson in accurate details, but looks to be taught some deeper insight into beauty and expression, through the finer perception of the artist—so the chatty school of novelists soon weary us, because what we naturally seek after is wanting” (208-9). Bagehot here is clearly talking about women: the feminine connotations of the “chatty school of novelists” (208) are bolstered by his choice for a representative writer—Jane Austen. For Bagehot, then,

women writers lack the ability to go beyond the careful observation of detail with which Dutch paintings were synonymous in the nineteenth century.

Male writers were, by contrast, awarded the faculties necessary to surpass mere detailism. Traits that I have already mentioned in previous chapters, such as a broader worldview and, in the words of Pykett, “the power of ‘generalization’ and ‘reasoning’” (26), were believed to assist men’s skill at realism. R. H. Hutton, writing anonymously for the *North British Review*, explicates the advantages of the masculine mind for realist writing. In contrast with that of women, Hutton argues, men’s “imagination” is “*separable* ... from the visible surface and form of human existence,” a condition that rescues it from “mere personal sentiment without any token of true imaginative power at all” (467). While “Feminine novelists never carry you beyond the tale they are telling,” he continues, “with men, you can see that some more general idea has governed the artistic composition; some desire, as in Sir Walter Scott, to contrast local customs, or a grand historic age, with modern civilization; some general creed about human nature, such as Mr. Kingsley is ever intruding into his tales” (468). For Hutton, then, men’s imagination, objectivity and “intellectual framework” (468) give them the ability to portray general human or historical truths in a way that women cannot. Hutton’s pronouncements on the gendering of realism are summarised succinctly by Henry James’s judgment on Eliot and other

“feminine” writers in his review of *Felix Holt*, which I cited in Chapter One: women have “microscopic observation, not a myriad of whose keen notations are worth a single one of those great synthetic guesses by which a real master attacks the truth.” The transcendent truth that was considered to belong to truly accomplished realism was, as we can see, firmly a masculine preserve.

Ouida was, of course, rarely praised for her “microscopic observation.” Nonetheless, criticism of her fiction also denied her the capacity to arrive at a higher truth in a way that often closely mirrors the way in which realist criticism treated women’s writing more generally. For instance, in a comment that evokes those by Hutton and Bagehot, above, Thomas Acland says in an 1874 review of *Two Little Wooden Shoes* for the *Examiner* that Ouida has little “to offer touching the great realities of being” because “She never gets beyond the rudimentary stage of existence” (827). Such criticism is echoed in the 1865 *Athenaeum* review of *Strathmore* (in which it is assumed that Ouida is a woman), where it is claimed that “There is a great deal of colour in the story, but no depth; the observations, whether made by the author in person or by her puppets, are bright and shallow” (142). This sense in which Ouida fails to arrive at general human truths is repeated in the *Contemporary Review*’s 1870 review of *Puck*, which damns her for “the old serving up of the tritest commonplaces as new and profound

reflections, the old general views of life which would be almost offensive if they were not simply absurd” (478). Given Ouida’s keen interest in, and resentment of, the realist critique of her fiction, it is difficult to believe she was unaware of the way in which she was here being incorporated into realism’s sexist discourse.

Women’s supposed inability to reach higher truths was not the only innate deficiency that was believed to exclude them from acquiring the authority of realist representation. Significantly, at the same time that scientific rationalism was crucially implicated in the professional ideology that was central to new formations of the literary artist, one tendency evident in mid-Victorian realist criticism is an attempt to supply, particularly through scientific method, the place of order and coherence that science itself was responsible for destabilising in the nineteenth century. Prior to this, Christian doctrine had supplied a stable worldview, which is described thus by A. Hunter Dupree:

The Christians of the English-speaking world in the early nineteenth century used a wide variety of patterns of symbols in both Scripture and tradition to send the messages of Creation, Fall from grace, the coming of the Messiah, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and ultimate salvation in the Second Coming and the Last Judgment. However, the arguments of natural theology shaped in the eighteenth century had put the story of creation into sharp relief as the one symbol necessary for all order in nature and all beneficence and moral structure in the universe. (354)

During the nineteenth century, the unifying anchor of Christian doctrine was increasingly undermined by developments in the fields of geology and natural history, as well as the rise of Biblical criticism.<sup>60</sup> Scientists and scholars such as Robert Chambers, who authored the popular 1844 book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach and perhaps above all Charles Darwin, undermined this stable worldview and contributed to a widespread sense of uncertainty. As Gerald Parsons says in the context of mid-Victorian debates about geology and theology, the real threat that was posed, “as Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* had recognized as early as 1850, was not to six-day Creation or Flood, but to the credibility of notions of purpose, design and moral order in an immense expanse of creation, uninhabited by humankind, and littered with the fossil record of failed species” (244). John Hedley Brooke describes the dismay that this kind of religious doubt produced in the young American William James in the 1860s, who “recorded that day after day he had awaked with a feeling of horrible dread” (317). “It seemed,” Brooke adds tellingly, “that the foundations of morality had collapsed, the freedom of the will fallen victim to scientific determinism” (317). Certainty and order had been replaced by incoherence and uncertainty.

Mid-nineteenth century British realism was in part a response to this sense of uncertainty, and, as a consequence, was characterised by a strong

impulse not just to imitate reality, but to order it into a unified and coherent whole. Critics and novelists consequently agreed that it was necessary to impose some form of order onto the chaos of reality. In the essay cited above, Bagehot argues that true realism requires a novelist to

enter into each [character] individually, and ... bind them all together. He must be in each and over all. He must not only catch and paint the distinct natures, but the uniting purpose which broods over them .... He must, in a certain sense, be the providence to the conceptions he has created, and colour his narrative with the feeling which has prompted him to group them in the same picture. From the beginning there should be a foreshadowing of the coming knot of destiny, though not of its solution; so as to give a unity of meaning to the whole, as well as individual life to the parts. (205)

This sense in which the author imposes teleology and unity on the incoherent matter from which he begins is underlined again when Bagehot criticises “the *accidental* school of fiction, in which men are delineated by random dots and lines” (206). Bagehot prefers, rather, that plots be “conceived first as an organic whole” (207). Reality may itself be “accidental” and “random,” but the realist author should be a source of coherence and unity.

We can see elsewhere the impulse in mid-Victorian realist criticism to use science to supply order and coherence. In an 1853 essay in the *Westminster Review* titled ‘The Progress of Fiction as an Art,’ an anonymous critic describes the contemporary taste for realism as a symptom of “a scientific, and somewhat sceptical age” that “has no longer the power of believing in the marvels which delighted our ruder ancestors” (74). These



modern readers and writers who are no longer satisfied with the less sophisticated fiction of their forbears prefer a plot in which the writer dominates reality by ordering it into “The carefully wrought story, which details events in orderly chronological sequence; which unfolds characters according to those laws which experience teaches us to look for as well in the moral as the material world; and which describes outward circumstances in their inexorable certainty, yielding to no magician’s wand, or enchanter’s spell” (74-5). Again, then, the essay’s author emphasises the need for the realist author to order reality according to a chronological and teleological sequence that is, in this case, governed by scientific rationalism.

Since, as I argued in the previous two chapters, rationality was conventionally gendered masculine in contrast with the irrationality and incoherence of femininity, realism’s capacity to impose order on reality (or “nature,” as it was significantly often phrased) was awarded to male authors, but not, in general, to women. This too can be seen in contemporary responses to women writers. The author of ‘The Progress of Fiction as an Art,’ for instance, connects femininity with those earlier writers who failed to depict “feelings and experiences in the strict analytical fashion, so much in vogue at the present time” (75) and argues that “The flimsiest modern novel that ever young lady devoured, or critic sneered at, is infinitely superior in artistic arrangement and skilful continuity of plot to even the most readable

of ancient fictions” (75-6). Likewise, in the *National Review* essay, Bagehot aligns feminine writing with those writers who fail effectively to create an “organic whole.” This link between femininity and a failure to control and order reality was made again by Bagehot in 1859 in the *Saturday Review*. In this essay, Bagehot examines “the favourite narratress of modern fiction—the quiet heroine.” He argues that:

A young lady of that kind can only in a modified way understand what passes around her. Not to speak of other limitations, the entire sphere of masculine action is wholly shut out from her perception. Half the incidents in life have their origin in events belonging to the active world, which she has no means of knowing. All around her people move and act from impulses and causes which she only very vaguely, if at all, apprehends, and which never enter her real world of secret thought. (125)

Such a feminine presence, this critic argues, leads to the “melodramatic incident,” by which

we mean a startling incident of which no rational or intelligible account is given. By a melodramatic character, we mean one which has the startling features and exaggerated qualities which tell upon the stage, but of which no real *rationale* is offered. In the case of the event, we have either no idea of its cause, or we perceive that cause to be improbable. In the case of the man, we do not know the inner nature out of which his startling peculiarities arise. These peculiarities are described to us, and we are told that they belong to a certain man, but what that man is we do not know. (125)

Although Bagehot is here specifically examining a female heroine, it is a very short distance from this feminine subject of fiction to a feminine writer, since both presumably are believed to suffer from the same shortcomings.

The message is clear: women's exclusion from full social life means that they are unable to provide rational accounts of reality that follow a coherent logic. They are doomed to represent life as irrational and melodramatic.<sup>61</sup>

One especially telling example of the gendering implicit in the critical insistence that realism rationalise reality is the way in which critical assessments of Eliot changed once she was discovered to be a woman. In 1859, the *Saturday Review* praised *Adam Bede* for adhering to the 'rule' that "There must be something more than the faculty of noting distinct, telling, characteristic points—there must be a central idea of the subject of the sketch around which minutiae are to be grouped" (74) and described approvingly the way in which "The continuity of character is so well kept up" (75). This praise of Eliot's rationalisation of a potentially chaotic reality is echoed by E. S. Dallas's review of *Adam Bede* for the *Times*, in which he praises Eliot for portraying "the grand fact of an underlying unity" (77). Not long afterwards, Eliot's gender was outed and the critical opinion of her ability to shape reality took on a new tone. The *Saturday Review*'s review of Eliot's next novel, *The Mill on the Floss*, meditates on the surprise incurred at the discovery of Eliot's gender ("To speak the simple truth ... it [*Adam Bede*] was thought to be too good for a woman's story" (114)) and compares her with other women writers. Although the review is generally favourable, it objects to Eliot's (and Charlotte Brontë's) treatment of "difficult moral

problems” on the grounds that it leads the reader to conclude that “human life is inexplicable” (117). The author of the *Westminster Review*’s review of the same novel is also troubled by Eliot’s failure to bring reality into line. While he or she praises the realism of Eliot’s “early pictures of mill life,” which “have all the natural truth of Landseer’s works without their somewhat affected prettiness” (141), the reviewer also argues that “The moral unity of the book is disturbed by a too brilliant and purely local light” (139). He or she then proceeds to describe how

The influence exercised by the sexes over each other is quite incalculable, is determined by no rules, is what the Germans call *doemonisch*, and beyond the sphere of reason. This is true enough in life, beneath whose surface we can penetrate to so small a depth, but in books we look for some indication of the affinities of choice; in this consists the distinction between art and nature, and on this point we think that George Eliot has sacrificed too much to her beloved realism. That realism, which is so triumphantly in place in all the prosaic relations of the Tullivers and Dodsons, seems here inadequate; we revolt at Maggie’s weakness, and take up arms against the author in spite of a truth we cannot controvert. (140)

Life, the reviewer concedes, is not bound by rational laws. To depict this in fiction, is, however, not acceptable; rather, the author has an obligation to create those laws that real life fails to supply, and it is precisely in this need to rationalise reality that Eliot fails.

Again, there are parallels between this gendering of realist practise and the criticism of Ouida’s own fiction. If the ability to rationalise reality and a concomitant tendency towards chaos and incoherence were both

qualities that were gendered in the critical discourse, it is worth noting that Ouida's novels were—strikingly, in fact—often represented as chaotic and confusing. The *Athenaeum* review of *Idalia*, for instance, compares Ouida's representation of “scenes and people” in that novel with clouds that “form” the “semblance of mountains, palaces, precipices, and strange shapes” and then “fade away under the gazer's eye,” producing in the reader a “dreamy, vague, confused sense” (283). The effect is of a confused, vague reality that hardly resembles the rational, coherent ordering associated with male realists. A similar phenomenon is described in the 1875 *Examiner* review of *Signa*, where the reviewer declares that “‘Ouida's’ morality, like her descriptions, is just a little hazy in outline” and adds that “Judicious advice might have sharpened her insight and steadied her ideas as to the proper treatment of the momentous questions of right and wrong which all novelists are bound to illustrate by the motives and destinies of their creations” (779). We can see here the idea that fiction requires a unifying “morality” that illuminates the “motives and destinies” of its characters, as well as criticism of Ouida's failure at this: the “morality” that ought to unify her text is “hazy in outline” and lacks steadiness. Yet another article in this vein is John Doran's review of *Folle-Farine* for the *Athenaeum*, which cites a “legendary mathematician, who is said to have finished his perusal of ‘Paradise Lost’ with the query, ‘What does it prove?’” If, Doran says, this mathematician

“had been compelled to go through Ouida’s new novel, he would hardly have had sense enough left to frame any question at all” because “A book at once so bewildering in its speculations, and so unbrokenly miserable in its details, is certainly not within the limits of our own experience” (264). Doran describes, significantly, a mathematician—a scientist who takes rationalisation of the text to such an extreme that he expects to be able to derive a logical theorem from poetry. If his reading of *Paradise Lost* is clearly misguided, he nonetheless reveals the extreme lack of rationality that characterises Ouida’s fiction, which is depicted as so chaotic that it would practically drive the mathematician to madness. Tellingly, the reviewer links this chaos with a poor grasp of reality: Ouida’s novel is “not within the limits of our own experience.” Such descriptions of chaos resemble the irrational, melodramatic representation of reality that Bagehot ascribes to women writers, and they are far removed from the notion of an ordered, rationalised realism that was considered to constitute its highest form. Even if Ouida’s fiction cannot ultimately be said to fall within the sphere of realism, these descriptions suggest that realist responses to Ouida’s fiction were in fact influenced by gendered stereotypes.

Indeed, these examples only partially indicate the extent to which realism was gendered in the critical discourse that Ouida faced. For all that women were urged to conform to its dictates, realism was a literary style

whose contours were inescapably constructed as masculine. We can explore this further by looking at the particular shape of the visual tropes around which realism was structured in critical discourse. The centrality of looking to realism has been remarked upon by numerous critical commentators, both Victorian and modern. As Christopher Prendergast notes in his introduction to the volume *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre*, “the visual arts” are an apt “analogy for literary representation itself” (4) in that “realism invites us above all to *look* at the world” (5). Amongst nineteenth century critics, comments like Lewes’s 1865 criticism of a novel called *Maxwell Drewitt* on the grounds that, “I do not really *see* the election riot” (‘Criticism’ 536) abound, as does imagery of painting, photographs, mirrors and microscopes. In 1876, for example, R. E. Francillon refers in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* to “the ever-new pleasure” to the “plain man” of “examining his own photograph” and seeing “ourselves and all our relations and friends mirrored and dissected” by “looking-glass or microscope” (384). This rhetoric of dissection is a particularly prominent facet of realist criticism during the nineteenth century. Whether used in a positive way, as here, or in a negative way by, for example, those critics who objected to the naturalism of Emile Zola later in the century, it invokes a sense of an all-dominating gaze that pierces the skin and allows no secrets to be withheld from it.

The bearer of this knowing realist gaze was gendered male. In the previous chapter, I discussed, in the context of what I termed literary professionalism, how men were privileged with knowledge about the female character, while women writers were denied any knowledge at all about men, and less than male authors about their own sex. In keeping with the realist economy of looking, these descriptions of male knowledge are often formulated in terms of sight and looking. Trollope, said the *Saturday Review* in 1863, “devotes himself to painting ... the young female heart,” and his “natural insight” allows him “to succeed” (rev. *Rachel Ray* 184); “His [Trollope’s] merit,” echoed the *Times* the same year, “lies in his charming portraiture of the [female] sex” (rev. *Rachel Ray* 190). Likewise, claimed the critic George Moir in 1842, Samuel Richardson exhibited a remarkable “insight” (46) into women. The contours of the masculine body in the realists’ gaze is especially evident in the language of penetration that often characterises discussions of realism—in 1856, for example, William Caldwell Roscoe described how Thackeray “penetrates deeper into the characters of women than of men” (129).

One thing that is particularly notable here is the extent to which it is *women* who are at stake in realist representation. If, as Belsey argues, “[s]ubjectivity is a major—perhaps the major—theme of classic realism” (*Critical* 73), it is notable that reviewers were far more concerned with



(male) realists' expertise in representing female characters than male characters. As Prendergast points out, realism has a particular interest in the "female body" (5). Concomitantly, it is far more common for male authors like Trollope, Thackeray and Dickens to be praised for their realistic representation of female characters than for women writers to be cited as authorities on their own sex. The framework here is of a male gaze fixed on a female body.

The notion of a masculine gaze has become a commonplace of feminist dramatic theory since Laura Mulvey first published her article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen* in 1975. Whereas Mulvey regards mainstream Hollywood films as cultivating a masculine gaze that views women on screen as a source of voyeuristic pleasure, however, I am interested in the realist gaze as a source of masculine knowledge.<sup>62</sup> In the realist critical economy, the masculine gaze is privileged with the authority of knowing, and the object of his knowing is particularly the female body. The female self is seen and known completely: a male author like Trollope "knows every fold of feeling" of "the feminine heart" (*Times* rev. *Rachel Ray* 190). Similarly, Moir says of Samuel Richardson that

we may trust implicitly to his accuracy, when he is delineating the movements of passion in the female breast, the revolutions of feeling, or the struggle between feeling and delicacy. In his female portraits even more than in his corresponding delineations of male character, we acknowledge the justice of the remark which Sir Walter Scott

applies to his portraits generally, that ‘in his survey of the heart, he left neither head, bay, nor inlet behind him, until he had traced its soundings, and laid it down in his chart with all its minute sinuosities, its depths, and its shallows.’ (46)

According to Scott’s description, cited approvingly by Moir, Richardson penetrates deep into the inner depths of the feminine self, tracing every contour with scientific accuracy. As Moir also points out, however, Richardson’s knowledge is more limited when it comes to the male character. In this Mulveyan economy of a male gaze fixed on a female object, it is the representation of the female self that is at stake.

There is a kind of violence implicit in this absolute baring of women to the realist eye that is most clearly expressed in the language of dissection—the slicing through the body to get to its inner core—prominent in discussions of realism. This language of violence has been noticed by John Bender, who describes the “impersonal violence involved in the scientific framing of objects—in effacing mysterious otherness by infiltrating autonomous bodies with knowledge, by ‘flaying’ them with light’s probing rays” (112). “When,” Bender continues,

the form of knowledge known as realist narrative infiltrates the bodies and minds it represents ... its ‘technico-political possession’ dominates and mutilates—symbolically dissects and even castrates—these bodies whether the instrument is the anatomical knife in the impartial hands of Reason that exposes flaws in the carcass of Swift’s Beau [from his essay ‘A Digression on Madness’], or the penetrating gaze of clinical inquiry, or the novelistic depiction of consciousness. (112-3)

Perhaps more pertinently, there is also a kind of violence evident in the way in which, in a manner analogous with the cinematic gaze in Mulvey's theory, the critical realist gaze reduces women to a conventional model of femininity that assists the production of men's own, active identity. This reduction of women to the object of men's subjectivity is discussed by Simone de Beauvoir in her reinscription of Hegelian theory in *The Second Sex*. The subjectivity of a dominant group in society is, de Beauvoir points out, impossible without an "Other" for "the One" to "se[t] up ... over against itself" (xlv). However, while "wars, festivals, trading, treaties, and contests among tribes, nations, and classes tend to deprive" the national, racial, religious or social other "of its absolute sense" by enabling "the other consciousness, the other ego," to "se[t] up a reciprocal claim," such "reciprocity has not been recognized between the sexes" (xlvi). Denied their own subjectivity, women are trapped, in this system, as the other to men's subjectivity.

This reduction of women to the objects of men's subjectivity is carried out in the logic of the realist gaze. While, as Patricia Schroeder suggests, female characters in realist texts do frequently defy conventional gender ideology (29), in the critical discourse itself, female characters that are specifically praised for their realism tend to be those that conform to a

model of conventional femininity that emphasises their passivity and lack of agency in relation to male characters. A survey of the critical response to Trollope, widely considered to be a master of representation of the female sex, readily confirms this. An 1857 review in the *Saturday Review* of *The Three Clerks*, for example, praises the realism of the Woodward daughters, who “are like real girls” (56), and elaborates thus on this judgment: “They have the strong and the weak points of young women in real life. They love their lovers, and hate their lovers’ enemies, and stick by the lovers themselves, both before and after marriage, with a constancy which neither pique, nor poverty, nor disgrace can shake” (56). According to this reviewer, the realism of these female characters arises from qualities that emphasise their relativity to the male agents in the novel: these ‘real’ women live vicariously through their lovers’ interaction in the wider world. Similarly, while the *Times* review of *Rachel Ray*, which emphasises the “great glory” of Trollope’s realistic “portraiture of the fair sex” (190), states that women are “the chief agents” of the story, the qualities that the reviewer ascribes to Trollope’s female characters lack any of the active qualities associated with agency: “The women being the chief agents, and being at the same time innocent and womanly, have nothing to do but to fall in love and marry, and to encounter in the process the strife of female tongues” (191). (Meanwhile, “The hero of the tale is a young brewer who means to reform Devonshire, to

abolish cider-drinking, and to introduce good beer into that benighted land” (191).) In yet another review of Trollope’s novels, this time of *The Small House at Allington* in the *London Review* in 1864, the character of Mrs. Dale is praised as “a real, true woman in her virtues and her faults” (203). Again, the reviewer elaborates on the truthfulness of Mrs. Dale’s representation by describing qualities that suggest that ‘real’ femininity exists as a passive relation to active masculinity: “A widow but forty years of age, with a pair of children, and left rather poor, she has fancied it her duty to renounce all the pleasures of life, and shut herself up in a proud humility” (203). This praise of the realistic portrayal of a woman who shuts herself away after the death of her husband yet again valorises qualities that emphasise women’s passivity and lack of agency.

The assumption, on the other hand, that female agency is inherently unreal is particularly striking in an 1863 article on ‘George Eliot’s Novels’ by Richard Simpson for the *Home and Foreign Review* (perhaps unsurprisingly, Eliot, easily the most prominent of the female realists, seems to have galvanised critics to theorise about women’s realism in general; certainly, criticism of her fiction is an unusually rich source of such comments). “Women,” argues Simpson, “work more by influence than by force, by example than reasoning, by silence than speech”; Eliot, however, “grasps at direct power through reasoning and speech,” and “having thus

taken up the male position, the male ideal becomes hers [Eliot's],—the ideal of power.” As a consequence, Simpson surmises, “The direct power and the celebrity of authorship may obscure and replace the indirect influence and calm happiness of domestic feminine life,” rendering her “too far separated from the ordinary life of her sex to be a good judge of its relations” (241). The implications here are quite clear. ‘Real’ women are characterised by the quiescence of “influence” and “silence.” When, in a literary text, they are ascribed qualities associated with agency—the force and power acquired “through reasoning and speech”—they become too masculine to be real.

This patterning, in which a male realist gaze scrutinises the female self that in turn functions as the object for male subjectivity, reveals the deep gendered roots of the critical discourse against which Ouida had to contend. It is, I think, significant that for all the many lines of text in periodical columns that discuss her failure at realism, her ability (or inability) to depict life is very rarely described in terms of the kind of visual tropes of sight or dissection—the realist gaze—that I have described above. This exclusion from the gaze as it is constructed in realist criticism illuminates in particular the vociferous denunciation of her portrayal of male characters: a woman writer like Ouida could not, without difficulty, resist women’s situation as object and assume the male gaze.

It is also worth noting that the version of femininity that was sanctioned by the masculine realist gaze was one within whose boundaries she was not content to confine her fiction. As I discussed in Chapter One, Ouida's early novel *Strathmore*, in which the character of Lady Vavasour functions as an affront to the passive domestic heroine at mid-century, explicitly challenges conventional gender binaries. Indeed, all of Ouida's novels were replete—defiantly replete, even—with colourful and unconventional women who vigorously opposed the passive middle-class domestic ideal. *Under Two Flags* features a cursing, shooting, drinking, flirting vivandière named Cigarette whose heroism in the French army in Algeria earns her the Cross of the Legion of Honour. *Chandos* includes an impoverished beauty who formulates a calculated scheme to seduce the novel's hero into marrying her (which she abandons when he is ruined), as well as the character of Madame de la Vivarol, Chandos's former mistress and a "pretty, worldly, pampered, and little-scrupulous countess" who publicly declares herself to be "infidelity itself" (66). After Madame de Vivarol is jilted by Chandos at the beginning of the novel, she devises a plan to destroy him by arranging for him unwittingly to marry a woman who is believed to be his own daughter. The eponymous heroine of *Idalia* is a political intriguer: a "sorceress" who "owned a limitless power, and was unscrupulous and without pity in its use" (88). Viva in *Tricotrín* is, as we

have seen, an ambitious orphan who rejects the quiet domestic life that Tricotrin first offers her in favour of wealth and fame. In many ways, then, Ouida's novels were an affront to the gendered lines upon which realism was drawn, and we may surmise that this was a particular factor in critical outrage at her novels. Given her desire to present models of femininity that exceeded those allowed to mid-century realism—her wish, as she put it in her letter to the *Times* in 1883, to offer readers more than a representation of the world in which people are “always seated at an Aunt Tabitha's tea-table” (10)—it is additionally unsurprising that Ouida would have cause to resist the gender bias in mid-Victorian realist criticism.

All in all, then Ouida had good reason to resent the dominant realist criticism of the mid-nineteenth century. She was justified in concluding that she was a victim of the gendered bias that informed mid-century realism as it was represented in the critical press; moreover, that critical discourse supported models of femininity to which she refused to confine herself. 1878 was, however, a moment of opportunity for a writer like Ouida who was dissatisfied with the realist aesthetic of the mid-century. This can be seen more clearly by going forward slightly in time, to around 1880, when a distinct change in the novel was being remarked upon in critical circles. In an 1880 article titled ‘The New Fiction,’ the literary critic and children's author



W. B. Rands makes an early observation about the novel's shift towards a more serious artistic genre:

Within the last twenty years the novel proper has undergone a development which may still be pronounced astonishing even by those who have been accustomed to consider it, and has taken rank side by side—at no humiliating distance, though, of course, not close—with poetry and philosophy, formally so entitled. It is far otherwise than sarcastically true that 'Romola' and 'Daniel Deronda' cannot be called light reading; and, passing away from fiction of that graver sort, it is abundantly clear that not even yet has criticism done all the work which the New Fiction has cut out for it in the way of widening its scope and improving the instruments by which it endeavours to trace the more subtle affiliations of literature. (151)

Rands is clearly aware that the novel is evolving into something much more artistically self-conscious. He remarks on the novel's growing affinity with poetry, which as I discussed in the previous chapter was unambiguously linked with serious art, and notices the appearance of texts like *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*, both examples of Eliot's more difficult and less popular later fiction. In this early article, though, Rands does not mention either James or Howells, the two authors who were to be most strongly linked with what would be seen as the "new" style of fiction. This had changed by 1883, when articles like Arthur Tilley's 'The New School of Fiction' in the *National Review* and L. J. Jennings's 'American Novels' in the *Quarterly Review* were aligning James and Howells with the "new school" of fiction and openly discussing its characteristics. These included, as Tilley put it, "elaborate analysis of character ... the absence of plot ... the sparing use of

incident,” and “studied realism” (225) (or, in Jennings’s less complimentary words, “laboured and tedious writings” that are “based upon the principle that the best novelist is he who has no story to tell” (225)). Most importantly, James’s and Howells’s writing was characterised by a new artistic consciousness: a desire to make “fiction a ‘finer art’ than it ever was before” (226), in Jennings’s words, or, as Tilley put it, “the subordination of the artist to his art” (255). This artistic consciousness was affirmed a year later when James issued his aesthetic manifesto ‘The Art of Fiction’ in the pages of *Longman’s Magazine*.

This new artistic consciousness did not suddenly arrive, fully formed, at the beginning of the 1880s, of course; it had been gradually developing since the reaction against sensation fiction began to split high art from popular art.<sup>63</sup> Both James and Howells began writing in the early 1870s (James’s short novel *Watch and Ward* was first published in 1871 and Howells’s *The Wedding Journey* was first published in 1872), and criticism of the novel’s growing emphasis on art is increasingly evident in the criticism of the period. In an 1873 essay on ‘Dickens in Relation to Criticism,’ for example, Lewes was moved to criticise the “bias of technical estimate in Art” (27) (which implicitly includes fiction) in which “the pleasure derived from the perception of difficulty overcome, leads to such a preponderance of the technical estimate, that the sweep of the brush, or the

composition of lines, becomes of supreme importance, and the connoisseur no longer asks, What is painted? but How it is painted?” (28). Similarly, in an essay on Eliot for the *Contemporary Review* in 1877, the Irish poet and critic Edward Dowden responded negatively to the growing influence of aestheticism, praising Eliot for producing art that “is not a mere luxury for the senses, not a mere æsthetic delicacy or dainty” as well as for resisting “indifference ... as to what is called the substance or ‘content’ of works of art” and the notion that “form” (443) has “a separate and independent existence” (443-4). Dowden even argues that

George Eliot has herself alluded in a passing way to the presence of the same vice in our contemporary literature: ‘Rex’s love had been of that sudden, penetrating, clinging sort which the ancients knew and sung, and in singing made a fashion of talk for many moderns whose experience has been by no means of a fiery daemonic character.’ (444)

Again, this implies a privileging of what conservative critics considered to be more ‘superficial’ characteristics like formal technique over the “substance” of “content.”

The values that this younger generation of writers rejected—values that would now popularly be viewed as ‘Victorian values’—are perhaps best encapsulated by Mark Girouard’s description of earnestness, which he defines as “an attitude to life both serious and moral, characteristic of people who took their religion and their marriage-vows seriously, and believed that

they were put in this world to cultivate their talents and assets for the benefit of others, and had a duty to do so” (50). Girouard’s definition invokes the qualities of conservatism, duty, respectability and morality; we might also add empiricism (in contrast with the theoretical bias associated with the French in particular) and sentiment. By the second half of the nineteenth century, these ‘Victorian values’ were beginning to coalesce into a symbol of mainstream culture that was to be rejected by a younger, more artistically self-conscious generation of writers and artists. Peter Keating describes how “during the last thirty years of Victoria’s reign” there was a “youthful mood of a whole world in transformation, with old habits and values to be thrown aside and an incalculable range of new options to choose from” that was “duplicated again and again” (97). “Everywhere,” he continues, “there is not simply a questioning of fundamental beliefs ... but an air of denigration and mockery, a determination to reject mid-Victorian values and take a chance on what comes next” (98). Keating gives numerous examples of this agitation against mid-Victorian values, from Robert Louis Stevenson’s and Charles Baxter’s 1872 decree that members of their debating society at Edinburgh University should “Disregard everything our parents have taught us” (cited in Keating 98), to “Yeats’s ‘tragic generation’ of the 1890s in ‘revolt against Victorianism’” (98), to H. G. Wells’s semi-autobiographical character Remington in *The New Machiavelli* (1911), who, looking back at

his days at Cambridge, declares, “We were not going to be afraid of ideas any longer, we were going to throw down every barrier of prohibition and take them in and see what came of it” (cited in Keating 97). Collectively, these writers used middle-class mid-Victorian values as a foil against which to set off what they perceived as more modern, and more advanced, ideas.

The mid-Victorian realism of writers like Thackeray, Trollope and Eliot easily became seen as a manifestation of mid-Victorian values. As Dowden’s linking of her with the older fiction suggests, Eliot especially became a sort of yardstick for the “new” writers who emerged from around the 1870s and actively sought to mark their artistic superiority by defining themselves against the mid-Victorians. Of course, not only does this ignore the evolution of Eliot’s later fiction, but it is supremely ironic that it was a woman who came to be the most representative practitioner of the mid-Victorian realism that the later Victorians wished to reject. The latter phenomenon can be accounted for in two ways. First, to a large degree Eliot uniquely succeeded in being accepted as an honorary man (it is hardly coincidental that throughout the nineteenth century until the present day Eliot remained known by her masculine penname, in stark contrast with other women writers who used masculine pseudonyms such as the Brontë sisters). Second, as Naomi Schor points out, “the logic of misogyny is a no-win logic where whatever is connoted as feminine ... is devalorized” (*Idealism* 67).

Thus as soon as there was a desire to reject mid-Victorian realism, it was easy for Eliot to become representative of it.

This is particularly evident in James's attitude towards Eliot. While one might expect him to have had a natural affinity with an author whose artistic and intellectual prowess is indisputable, he was in fact highly ambivalent towards her. James's ambivalence towards Eliot can be explained by his need to distance himself from the mid-Victorian realism that she epitomised in order to establish himself at the forefront of the new aesthetic novel. What James is challenging when he criticises Eliot is really the realism that was the critical darling of the mid-century. Thus the themes that run through James's criticism of Eliot are frustration at her choice of moral earnestness over artistic quality and the heaviness that consequently (according to James) characterises her realism, criticisms that are consistent with anti-Victorian sentiments that persist to this day. These themes recur in all of James's criticism of Eliot's novels throughout the 1870s and are perhaps stated most clearly in his 1885 review of John Cross's *Life of George Eliot* five years after her death. In this review, James sees "The fault of most of her work" as "the absence of spontaneity, the excess of reflection" and a commitment to "a kind of compensatory earnestness" (495). He also criticises "that side of George Eliot's nature which was weakest—the absence of free æsthetic life" (497): while she "may be said to have acted on

her generation” (497) by her commitment to moral mores, “the ‘artistic mind’ ... existed in her with limitations remarkable in a writer whose imagination was so rich” (498). Indeed, James argues, “It is striking that from the first her conception of the novelist’s task is never in the least as the game of art” (497). For James, then, Eliot lacks the intense artistic mission and aesthetic sophistication that was to characterise his own generation of writers.

A similar sense of rejection can be seen in criticism by Algernon Swinburne, who since the 1860s had been at the vanguard of rebellion against mid-century values. In his 1877 essay on Charlotte Brontë, Swinburne relegates Eliot to “the second order of literature” (406). He attacks the dullness of Eliot’s realism, which is marked by “knowledge” and “culture” but lacks the “purity of passion,” the “depth and ardour of feeling” and the “spiritual force and fervour of forthright inspiration” of Brontë’s writing. As someone with “mere intellect” rather than “mere genius,” Eliot engages in the realist “dissection of dolls,” a practice for which Swinburne has “no taste” (407). Swinburne’s rejection of Eliot’s realism as dull and non-transcendent is summarised in his assessment of Maggie Tulliver’s affair with Stephen Guest, about which “our only remark, as our only comfort, must be that at least the last word of realism surely has been spoken, the last abyss of cynicism has surely been sounded and laid bare”

(409). This rejection of Eliot belongs to an impulse that is, finally, distinctly realised by Thomas Hardy in 1890, when he declares that, “Art is a disproportioning—(*i.e.* distorting, throwing out of proportion)—of realities, which if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed but would more probably be overlooked. Hence ‘realism’ is not Art” (cited in Graham 39). Mid-Victorian realism has, at this point, fallen well out of the critical favour of serious late-Victorian writers.

When Ouida published *Friendship* in 1878, then, it was increasingly becoming apparent that mid-Victorian realism was being eroded by a shift in critical taste towards a more artistically self-conscious, formalist oriented style of writing. There was a growing backlash against the mid-Victorian, middle-class realism that, as we have seen, had marginalised women writers, even if the direction in which serious fiction was going to shift was not yet certain. As a woman writer who had especially suffered from the promotion of mid-Victorian realist critical values and who was profoundly concerned with being recognised as an artist, Ouida seized the opportunity both to present her own critique of realism and to put forward an alternative novelistic aesthetic that offered women a serious place in the production of artistic representation.

The base of the argument that Ouida puts forward in *Friendship* is described in detail in ‘Romance and Realism.’ In this essay, Ouida disposes



of realism and replaces it with a literary aesthetic that ascribes superior artistic merit to her own fiction. She first links realism with the middle-class, middlebrow public: that is, “the London *litterateur* with his prim domesticities bound up in a duodecimo suburban villa” or the “rural clergyman solemnly pacing his treadmill of weekly monotonies.” This middle-class public is represented as not only uneducated (“the rotund Philistine”) but priggish (“the prim life of the æsthetic prig”), a criticism that mirrors late-Victorian antagonism to mid-Victorian realism like James’s disparagement of Eliot’s “compensatory earnestness.” Ouida then links the realism consumed by this reading public with various kinds of mundane objects and events which she compares with those of a more romantic cast. Labelling the former the “*éternellement vrai*” and the latter “the *infiniment petit*,” she declares:

It may be well that there should exist painters of the latter [the *éternellement vrai*] as it may be well that there should exist carvers of cherry-stones, and men who give ten years of their existence to the production of a ladybird in ivory. But the Vatican Hermes is as ‘real’ as the Japanese netzké, and the dome of St. Peter’s is as real as the gasometer of East London; and I presume that the fact can hardly be disputed if I even assert that the passion flower is as real as the potato! (3)

The first class of objects described in this passage—cherry-stone carvings, gasometers and potatoes—is characterised by its mundanity. Ouida here emphasises an aspect of mid-Victorian realism that was strongly linked with

its mimetic function, or the need accurately to observe details in the world. That is, there was a connection between realist observation and the need to recognise and depict ordinary objects, a connection that would have been familiar to the Victorians and which is evident, for example, in Lewes's plea for plain peasants with untidy clothes as well as Eliot's preference for old women in mob-caps "bending over" their "flower-pot[s]" (177) in the famous passage at the beginning of Book 2 of *Adam Bede*. Reducing realism generally entirely to its mimeticist pole with a strong emphasis on the mundaneness of the objects with which it is associated, Ouida denies it the kind of higher or transcendent truth that was, as I have discussed, specifically denied women, including, of course, herself.

Ouida compares the class of objects associated with middle-class realism with a second class that she associates with her own fiction. These objects invoke the kind of transcendent truth that truly great realism was believed to require. Artistic masterpieces like the Vatican Hermes and St. Peter's Basilica are clearly intended to be seen to invoke the artistic or historical truth denied to a potato or a gasometer, and Ouida's appreciation for them inscribes her with the artistic sensibility necessary to portray the kind of "poetry" that Lewes sees in the second of his two village groups in 'Realism in Art.' This sense in which certain artefacts offer greater access to a higher truth than others is evident in Ouida's use of the terms

“*éternellement vrai*” and “*infiniment petit*.” The phrase “*infiniment petit*” expresses a sense of littleness or triviality that falters in comparison with the trans-historical or higher truth described by the “*éternellement vrai*.” Ouida has here reversed the usual trajectory of mid-Victorian realist criticism, assigning herself the transcendent truth generally denied to women novelists and suggesting that it is mainstream mid-Victorian realism that is mired down by mundane materiality. At the same time, Ouida does not allow her own artistic model to become so entirely detached from mimeticism that it slides into pure idealism. Rather, she emphasises the materiality of artefacts like the Vatican Hermes and the passion flower, which are, she insists, as “real” as gasometers and potatoes. Her artistic success relies upon real artefacts whose romantic cast crucially facilitates access to transcendent or higher truth. Again, too, the self-conscious aestheticism that is here contrasted with the ordinariness of realism is very much reminiscent of late-Victorian criticism of the mid-Victorians.

When Ouida published ‘Romance and Realism’ in 1883, late-Victorian critiques of realism were becoming more common and, as the publication of Tilley’s and Jennings’s articles the same year shows, there was a growing sense of the way in which the more ‘artistic’ fiction of the late century was establishing itself. In 1878, however, as I have explained, matters were less certain. *Friendship*, the text in which Ouida first lays out

the arguments that she makes explicitly in 'Romance and Realism,' seizes the moment of opportunity presented by the early coalescence of critical opinion against mid-Victorian realism. In this novel, Ouida attacks mid-Victorian realism and proposes an alternative aesthetic that, if crucially limited in the end, nonetheless allows women authority of representation.

As I indicated in Chapter One, *Friendship* is a thinly-veiled account of Ouida's love affair with the Marchese Lotteringhe della Stufa and her rivalry with della Stufa's supposed lover, Janet Ross.<sup>64</sup> The novel depicts Ouida as a Belgian artist called Etoile (a Comtesse d'Avesnes, no less) who travels to Rome to recover her delicate health. She is sought out by Ouida's version of Ross, the Lady Joan Challoner, a married woman who is having an affair with the Italian Prince Ioris (della Stufa). Lady Joan is portrayed as a hypocritical social climber who has installed herself and her husband in Ioris's ancestral home, Fiordelisa, and who occupies her time ransacking its treasures and farming it for her own personal profit (there are shades of truth here: Ross was an enthusiastic businesswoman who cultivated and sold produce from the estate she rented from della Stufa). Ioris resents Lady Joan's presence, and does not even seem ever to have had much affection for her, but is too weak to expel her or end their affair. He and Etoile fall in love with each other. Despite his repeated promises, however, he fails to extricate himself from Lady Joan's clutches and publicly admit his relationship with

Etoile. The novel ends with Etoile unhappily renouncing Ioris, who goes back to the triumphant Lady Joan.

*Friendship* is clearly a gross distortion of the events upon which it is ostensibly based. The grotesque Lady Joan, the incomprehensibly motivated Ioris and the impossibly flawless Etoile are obviously exaggerations.<sup>65</sup> However delusional Ouida may or may not have been about her failed romance with della Stufa, and however tedious the novel itself may ultimately be (a verdict shared by the British press, who did not seem to be aware of the novel's scandalous origins), *Friendship* nonetheless offers a revealing glimpse into issues of gender and representation at a crucial moment in the history of literary representation.

The fulcrum around which the critique of realism in *Friendship* turns is Lady Joan, who functions in the novel as the embodiment of mid-Victorian realism and holds the authority of representation for the public depicted in the novel. Lady Joan's alignment with mid-Victorian realism is signalled by her pointed alignment with mundane objects reminiscent of those described in 'Romance and Realism.' Thus, in a grotesque exaggeration of realism's interest in the ordinary details of life, Lady Joan's body is overtly de-romanticised. She wears a "large stout boot which tramped over his [Ioris's] ploughed fields and in and out so many studios, and up and down so many stairs" (200). In another passage, she is described

“with thick untanned leather boots on, hair pulled tight from her face, and a grey skirt tucked up about her legs, or astride upon a donkey in a waterproof in muddy weather, counting the artichokes and tomatoes before they went to market” (93). Lady Joan’s body performs the crudest of human behaviour: she screams (84, 177), shrieks (199), and grimaces (144) in triumph.

Lady Joan’s social status relies upon her ability to manipulate truth to the satisfaction of the public in *Friendship*. Significantly, the public that she courts is primarily middle-class: that is, the same public particularly associated with the consumption of mid-Victorian realist novels and linked with realism in ‘Romance and Realism.’ Excluded from the very highest circles, Lady Joan successfully courts “the Infiniment Petit”—the same term that was used in ‘Romance and Realism’ to describe non-transcendent realism—and secures

the suffrages of all the little people who wanted to be great, of all the frogs who wanted to be bulls, of all the geese who wanted to be swans, of all the free and enlightened republicans who flew to a title as a moth to a light, of all the small gentilities who were nobodies in their own countries at home, but abroad gave themselves airs, and had quite a number of figures to their bank balance—in francs. (105)

She courts “a shoddy Cræsus dazzled with the statesmen and the duchesses in her photograph” and gives “a pressing invitation to a nervous nonentity; a flattering deference to a wealthy pomposity ... a present of fruit to folks rich enough to buy up Hesperides”: “nothing was too small for her, wise woman

that she was” (78). Lady Joan, the narrator takes care to emphasise, is acutely aware that her interests lie squarely with the middle-classes.

Lady Joan presents a front of domestic propriety for the benefit of her mainly middle-class audience that is clearly meant to evoke the subject matter favoured by domestic realists like Yonge, Trollope or Eliot and flatter the “priggish” sentiments that Ouida links with the middle-class reading public in ‘Romance and Realism.’ In one passage, the narrator describes how

The Casa Challoner itself received on a Wednesday, making on that day a solemn religious sacrifice to the Bona Dea. It was specially swept and garnished, morally as well as actually; the pipes and cigars were locked up, the too-suggestive statuettes put out of sight; the good-looking slaves all banished; and little Effie [the Challoners’ daughter], prettily dressed, was prominently petted by her mother; Mr. Challoner was as cordial and communicative as nature would permit him to become, and Lady Joan was as full of proper sentiments and domestic interest as if she were a penny paper or a shilling periodical. In her bevy of English dowagers, American damsels, and Scotch cousins, amidst the bankers and consuls’ and merchants’ wives, the small gentilities and the free-born republicans, Lady Joan was sublime: she would have been worthy the burin of Balzac and the crowquill of Thackeray. (113)

The explicit references to texts of domestic realism are significant here. Both the “shilling periodical,” which included middlebrow magazines like the *Cornhill Magazine*, *Macmillan’s Magazine* and *Temple Bar*, and the “penny paper,” which presumably refers to family magazines like *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* rather than the sensational penny dreadfuls more readily associated with the term, specialised in texts of domestic realism.<sup>66</sup> In

addition, while Ouida's citation of Balzac is curious (he was certainly a pioneering realist but hardly linked in the British mind with representations of domestic propriety), Thackeray was recognised by the Victorians as an early and accomplished practitioner of mid-Victorian realism. Equally importantly, this passage foreshadows late-Victorian criticisms of mid-Victorian moral hypocrisy by exposing Lady Joan's front of domestic propriety—and, by extension, that of realism generally—as a complete sham. Her respectable front hides the fact that she is having an affair with Ioris, cares little about her child or husband, comes “home from masquerades at five in the morning” and sings and smokes “with a dozen men about her, half the night” (106). Nonetheless, Lady Joan's enactment of domestic mores is utterly convincing to the public with whom she seeks to ingratiate herself. In one episode, she entertains the Lord and Lady of Norwich together with the Dean of St. Edmund's and his wife with “five hours of dreary and dignified platitudes” which include “her sound views of the dangers of Christianity from the Greek Church” and effusive thanks for “a promised recipe for knitting children's woollen stockings” (184). The manufactured nature of this “domestic picture on the hearthrug” (184) completely evades Lady Joan's guests, and they mutually conclude that she is “the most estimable of her sex” (185). The Dean's wife even praises Lady Joan for her “natural sentiment” (184) towards her children—“natural,” of course, being a



favoured realist quality, as we have seen in comments like the *Saturday Review*'s praise of Trollope's "natural insight" or the *Examiner*'s criticism of Ouida's "unnatural creation[s]." Lady Joan's ability to manipulate representation—in this case, the representation of her own self in alignment with domestic mores—is thus consummate and complete.

Lady Joan's control over the representation of reality extends to the way in which Etoile and her friend, the singer Dorotea Coronis, are represented to the general public. At first courting Etoile's friendship, Lady Joan soon recognises her threat as a potential love rival and sets about slandering her. In one episode, her minion, Mr. Silverly Bell, describes Etoile as a "great adventuress" (347). Lady Joan also tells others that Ioris is unwillingly pursued by Etoile: "he cannot endure Etoile, she persecutes him; actually wrote to him in Paris; would you believe it?" (355). These fictions are readily believed by her credulous audience, whose taste is for scandal over the less colourful truth. As the narrator says, "truth personal is rather a flower like the briar rose, too homely, too simple, and too thorny for men to care to gather it." People prefer instead "a lie, which, like the barometrical flower, will change its colour half a dozen times a day" (171). (Just what Ouida means here by a "barometrical flower" is obscure, but its implied artificiality and flashiness, in contrast with real flowers, is obvious.)

The primary intention of these passages is, of course, to correct what Ouida saw as false representations of her personal life. However, while, as we will see, Ouida certainly did not intend the reading public to view the truth represented in her fiction as “homely,” Lady Joan’s representation of Etoile is also clearly intended to invoke the dominant construction of Ouida herself in the realist-favouring critical press, which, as we have seen, generally concluded that her fiction was absurd, “highly coloured” nonsense that was fatally separated from any relation to real life. *Friendship* attempts to set the story straight as it were; to correct not only false representations of her self in the public eye, but false representations of her fiction. In order to do this, she uses Etoile to critique mid-Victorian realism and assign herself instead the kind of transcendent truth generally denied women. Thus, while the masculinised Lady Joan is associated with the mundane objects of non-transcendent realism, the emphatically feminised Etoile is heavily romanticised, linked with the kinds of transcendent objects associated with artistic fiction in ‘Romance and Realism.’ The first glimpse of her given to the reader is of “a heap of silver-fox furs, a pile of violets, a knot of old Flemish lace, and dreaming serious eyes that watched the sunset” (12). A few pages later, she is described wearing “velvet skirts” that “fell to her feet in the simple undulating folds that Leonardo da Vinci loved to draw” (30). Clearly, these artefacts are designed to depict an aesthetic and historical

consciousness that transcends the realism associated with Lady Joan. There is also a contrast between the way in which Etoile's and Lady Joan's bodies themselves are portrayed. Where Lady Joan grimaces and shrieks, Etoile's body is romanticised—she has “bright hued hair” and “eyes like the eyes of the boyish portrait of Shelley” (30).

Etoile's association with transcendental truth is particularly evident in her fervent appreciation of the beauty of sunsets, a predilection that the middle-class (realist) public in the novel fails to understand. At the beginning of the novel, for example, Etoile and her friend Dorotea Coronis, a famous beauty and opera singer, perturb the crowd that comes to admire her when they ignore it in favour of a beautiful sunset (12). Later in the novel, Etoile's friend Princess Vera accounts for the middle-class public's dislike of Etoile with the fact that, “She likes to see the sun rise” (147). Clearly, while both Etoile and the middle-class public see the same phenomenon—the sunset—each derives a different reality from it; furthermore, the exhilarating beauty that Etoile sees in sunsets signifies her appreciation of a more transcendent, aesthetic reality than that seen by the middle-class public. The public's inability to comprehend the transcendent truth that Etoile represents is emphasised in another telling passage, in which the narrator argues that “in nature there are millions of gorgeous hues to a scarcity of neutral hints.” In what looks like a clear dig at the mundane subject matter of mid-Victorian

realists, the narrator claims that “the pictures that are painted in sombre semi-tones and have no one positive colour in them are always pronounced the nearest to nature.” Ouida compares this preference for dullness over romantic truth with the reception of Etoile herself: “When a painter sets his palette,” the narrator says, “he dares not approach the gold of the sunset and dawn or the flame of the pomegranate and poppy. Etoile’s short story had this gold and red in it, and so no one believed in it any more than they do in the life-likeness of Turner’s *Hesperides*” (26). By arguing for the truth of Etoile’s “gold and red” in the face of those too frightened to represent anything other than the most mundane, Ouida defends her own fiction, suggesting that what is viewed as extravagance by the critical community is really the representation of an artistic, exalted truth that cannot be comprehended by mainstream realism. It is significant that she here compares herself to Turner, whose atmospheric, early impressionist paintings emphasising light and colour sharply contrast with the work of the Dutch realists who, as we saw above, Bagehot linked with non-transcendent literary realism.<sup>67</sup> It is also significant that, as in ‘Romance and Realism,’ Ouida anchors her transcendental truth in real objects, preventing her aestheticism from slipping into pure idealism. The calibre of the real artefacts linked with Etoile distinguishes her from Lady Joan’s realism and facilitates the production of a higher truth.

*Friendship*, then, develops the case that Ouida was to make against realism in ‘Romance and Realism.’ In a number of important ways, however, the fictional medium of *Friendship* enables greater exploration of the issues surrounding the critique of realism and the production of an alternative feminine aesthetic. Thus we can see in *Friendship* an implicit rejection of the male rationalisation linked with mid-Victorian realism. I have already shown how Lady Joan lacks Etoile’s ability to see transcendent truth. An extension of this lack is Lady Joan’s inability to see any value in the world other than what it can give her socially or materially. Her colonisation of Fiordelisa, which she transforms into a farm that enables her to market various kinds of produce, is an example of this:

she, like all other great improvers, was not to be daunted by such a trivial thing as poor folks’ devotion and mere clinging to old landmarks. She brought her new brooms and swept away with them vigorously; and if the brooms caught at such old trumpery tapestries as custom, tradition, and loyalty, and pulled them down in fragments, so much the better, she thought; she cared for no old rubbish—that wouldn’t sell again. (94)

This materialistic perspective, which is blind to values that transcend the economic, extends to her views on art. Setting herself up as an art dealer, Lady Joan sees art merely as something to be bought and sold, with no other value in or of itself. Ioris has been “Accustomed for years” to Lady Joan’s habits of “ransack[ing] all art only to get something to buy cheap and sell dear” and regarding “a picture or a bust only with an eye as to what it would

fetch in ten years' time" (193). In short, Lady Joan is a consummate rationalist who reduces all things to the mathematics of cash. Given the way in which, as I have discussed, women's perceived lack of rationality put them at a disadvantage at realist representation, supposedly preventing them from unifying reality coherently, this critique of rationalism in the context of a character who embodies mid-Victorian realism can hardly be coincidental. Significantly, Etoile pointedly lacks Lady Joan's rationalisation. While Lady Joan has brains that "are long and close and narrow, and shrewdly contain" knowledge about the management of "Madame Gründée," Etoile's mind has permeable boundaries: "A poet's brain leaks through dreams, and is too big to hold such knowledge [as the management of Mrs. Grundy]" (60).

Indeed, the novel as a whole can be read as a criticism of the unifying impulse of mid-Victorian realism. We can see this in the blurring of the boundaries of fact and fiction that results from *Friendship's* link with Germaine de Staël's 1807 novel, *Corinne; ou, l'Italie*. At the same time that Ouida declared *Friendship* to be a work of absolute truth, her *roman à clef*, the similarities between *Friendship* and *Corinne* are so strong that it is impossible not to see them as deliberate. The heroines of both novels are critically acclaimed artists who begin a doomed romance with a man who chooses another woman over her, and the failure of their lovers leads the heroines of both novels to lose their artistic ability. The second chapter of

*Friendship*, which is clearly modelled upon Book II of *Corinne* (the short books in *Corinne* are analogous to chapters; the episodes thus occur at parallel places in the two novels), is a particularly striking example of the similarities between the two novels. In Book II, of *Corinne*, the novel's heroine drives through Rome to the Capitol, drawing inquisitive attention from the crowds in the city. Uncertain about her origins—"No one knew where she had lived before or what kind of person she had been" (2)—the public speculates about who she might be. This book is obviously the source of Chapter 2 in *Friendship*, in which Etoile and Dorotea drive through Rome in the midst of a clamorous crowd. Etoile's deep affective affinity with Rome and its artistic and cultural history is also undoubtedly modelled on the character of Corinne.

De Staël's novel had a profound influence on women artists in Britain in the nineteenth century. From Geraldine Jewsbury, who wrote in *The Half-Sisters* that "The first reading of 'Corinne' is an epoch a woman never forgets" (cited in Surridge 82), to Anna Jameson and Mary Shelley, *Corinne* inspired women who wished to be recognised as serious artists or intellectuals.<sup>68</sup> In fact, *Corinne* was so popular that it produced what was known as the 'Corinne complex,' which, Glenda Sluga explains, was used to describe "those nineteenth-century women who aspired to travel Italy both to invest their own talents in the Italian Risorgimento and to achieve cultural

renown,” as well as, more generally, “women with feminist aspirations for political and cultural liberty” (242). Ouida could have assumed that a large proportion of her readers would have been familiar with *Corinne* and able to recognise the similarities between it and *Friendship*. The result is that the character Etoile/Comtesse d’Avesnes occupies a blurred zone between the ‘real’ world of Ouida (the penname of Marie Louise de la Ramée, which was itself a cover for the woman Maria Louise Ramé) and the fictional world of de Staël’s *Corinne*. This complicated diffusion at the borders of truth and fiction constructs an elusive character that challenges the unified reality that, as I discussed earlier, was awarded to the male realist. That is, *Friendship* confronts the reader not with a single, unified and easily graspable reality but a blurring of identity in a chain that ranges from Maria Louisa Ramé to Marie Louise de la Ramée to Ouida to the Comtesse d’Avesnes to Etoile to *Corinne*.

This blurring of identity can be regarded not only as a blurring of realist rationalisation, but as a challenge to the masculine realist gaze that sought thoroughly to grasp the female character. Indeed, this defiance of the realist gaze is another way in which *Friendship* exceeds ‘Romance and Realism’ in its critique of realism and gender. This defiance is evident in Etoile’s rebuffing of the attempts of the public in *Friendship* to understand and grasp her with a gaze that, while not exclusively wielded by male



characters, nonetheless evokes the masculine realist gaze in its attempt wholly and unsympathetically to ‘know’ her. I have already cited the second chapter of the novel, in which Etoile and her friend Dorotea are introduced to the reader for the first time and shown surveying Rome. As famous artists, they excite intense interest from the Roman public (including, it might be noted, Lady Joan), who “stared hard with all the admirable impudence of a well-bred mob” (11) and “all the stony-hearted inquisitiveness of Society” (12). Mirroring the dominating realist gaze, this public scrutiny of Dorotea and, especially, Etoile, is accompanied by an intense desire to know and understand their characters: “Who is Etoile?” (11) is the crowd's refrain.

Unable to discover the truth about her, the public simply makes up its own stories. As the narrator says, “The world supplies you with history as our great tailor supplies us with dresses: he surveys our face and figure and selects for us what is appropriate .... whether you like what is given you is of no moment either to Worth or the world: you have got to wear it” (19). Thus as the crowd at the beginning of the novel scrutinises the feminine object of its gaze, it claims knowledge about her character:

‘Who is she?’ said the crowd on the Pincio.  
 Nobody knew at all. So everybody averred they knew for  
 certain.  
 Nobody’s story agreed with anybody’s else’s, but that did not  
 matter at all. (12)

Etoile's own attempts to relate her history—that is, to exercise agency over the representation of her own self—are ignored. As the narrator says, “She had grown to see that no one ever believed a word she said; so silence had become a habit with her” (171). It is the crowd that assumes the right to construct Etoile's self.

Etoile, however, resists the domination of the realist gaze. In the scene at the beginning of the novel, she and Dorotea unsettle the crowd by refusing to acknowledge it. They simply turn their backs on it to watch the sunset, a profoundly unsettling move that leads an “aggrieved lady” to exclaim, “They don't seem to see us!” (11). The narrator elaborates: “She did not see them. She had a sad habit of not seeing those who surrounded her. When, recalled to a sense of her negligence, she begged the pardon of others for having overlooked them, she was not readily forgiven. People would rather be insulted than be unperceived” (11). Indeed, “This kind of oblivion was usually her deadliest sin” (12). The fact that Etoile's and Dorotea's refusal to acknowledge the realist gaze is so unsettling is interesting given that the objects of the gaze are, by definition, denied the authority to look back as a subject. What their obliviousness seems to suggest is the possibility that women have an independent life—that they have their own subjectivity that challenges their reduction to objects in the realist gaze. After all, what do Etoile and Dorotea do but turn their own gaze onto a sunset, which they

aesthetically appreciate? Etoile, then, instils uneasiness in the middle-class realist public because she testifies to realism's failure adequately to grasp and know women's characters as it reduces them to the object of the gaze. This sense in which the realist gaze fails properly to account for Etoile's character, and the anxiety that accompanies it, is evident elsewhere in the novel. Lady Joan instinctively does not like Etoile because "She could not make her out" (69); there is, as the narrator states, "nothing to be said about her" (20). Etoile's very name produces uneasiness from its evasion of the public's desire to pinpoint her identity: "To the world in general the name seemed strange, suspicious, uncomfortable, indicative of that string of asterisks on a page, which replaces what is too shocking to be printed" (23). The pseudonym 'Etoile' acts as a cover that evades the middle-class public's attempts to penetrate into her character.

At the same time that Etoile resists the authority of the realist eye, Ouida uses her to explore further the possibility of a novelistic aesthetic that allows women representative authority. Ironically appropriating the very logic that was used to trap women as the objects of the realist gaze, she argues that it is women who have true representative power. Thus in a highly evocative passage, Ouida describes Etoile as a young girl, "free to think and dream and study":

The soul of a girl whilst passions sleep, desires are unknown, and self-consciousness lies unawakened, can lose itself in the impersonal as no male student can. The mightiness and beauty of past ages become wonderful and all-sufficient to it, as they can never do to a youth beset by the stinging fires of impending manhood. The very element of faith and of imagination, hereafter its weakness, becomes the strength of the girl-scholar. The very abandonment of self, which later on will fling her to Sappho's death, or mure her in the cell of Heloise, will make her find a cloudless and all-absorbing happiness in the meditations of great minds, in the myths of heroic ages, in the delicate intricacies of language, and in the immeasurable majesties of thought. The evil inseparable from all knowledge will pass by her unfelt; the greatness only attainable by knowledge will lend her perfect and abiding joys. (27)

Ouida here compares male and female artistic aspirants and finds the feminine superior. This superiority issues from those very qualities that would ordinarily place women outside subjectivity. As objects lacking desire and “self-consciousness”—qualities that would generally signify their very status outside the gaze—girls are able to access the “impersonal” in a way inaccessible to men. Given the context of the passage in a narrative of developing artisthood as well as the Flaubertian/aestheticist resonance of the word “impersonal” (one ought to recall that late Victorian writers, as well as mid-Victorian rebels like Swinburne, were greatly influenced by French literary theorists, including Flaubert), it is difficult not to see this as a statement about women's artistic suitability that ironically functions within the patriarchy's own terms.<sup>69</sup>

After setting up Etoile as the representative of feminine aesthetic consciousness in the novel, Ouida uses her to explore the possibility of an artistic sensibility that avoids the exploitation of the feminine other implicit in the realist gaze. At the heart of this is Etoile's passionate adoration of nature. This connection between aesthetic sensibility and love of nature is revealed the very first time the reader sees Etoile, as she rapturously gazes at a sunset. Likewise, the story of Etoile's development as an artist is intimately linked with her love of nature. When describing her childhood development as an artist, the narrator relates the following exchange between her and her teacher:

‘*Tu es folle,*’ said her old teacher to her because she laughed and cried for joy to see the first primrose break out of the bleak brown earth, and kneeled down and kissed the flower, and told it how glad the birds would be, and would not to have saved her life taken it away from its shelter of green leaves. ‘*Tu es folle,*’ said the old teacher—it is what the world always says to the poet. (25)

Etoile's determination—explicitly linked to her identity as a “poet”—not to destroy the flower by plucking it implies an aesthetic that is self-consciously non-exploitative and which contrasts with Lady Joan's exploitative appropriation of nature as she farms Fiordelisa for profit. Significantly, Etoile's attempt at a non-exploitative aesthetic is characterised by the quality of wonder. Thus she is described as a young girl, developing her artistic sensibility:

And then what a world of wonders lay around!—the primroses, the blue jays, the leaping trout, the passing boats, the foxes that stole out almost familiarly, the squirrel swinging in the nut thickets of the hills, the charcoal-burners coming down rough and black to tell tales of the bears and wolves high up above, the great Flemish cart-horses walking solemnly in state caparison outward on the highroads to France or Prussia, the red lurid glow far away in the evening sky, which told where the iron-blasters of stern, fierce Liège were at work—these were wonders enough for a thousand years. (23-4)

Wonder, the lens through which Etoile regards the flowers, animals and artefacts of the world around her, implies a resistance to the production of merely material knowledge about the things upon which her gaze affixes.<sup>70</sup> Etoile's artistic gaze implicitly delights in the world around her while allowing the things that she sees to retain their own secret lives. This delight pointedly contrasts with the anxiety evinced by the realist eye that fails adequately to grasp Etoile's own character.

In this literary text that is uniquely positioned at the juncture between two modes of fiction—the middle-class realism of the mid-century and the artistically self-conscious fiction of the late century—Ouida thus proposes a literary aesthetic that incorporates and celebrates femininity. However, it is important to point out that there are crucial limitations to Etoile's artistic success, an aspect of the novel that gestures towards a more fundamental uncertainty on Ouida's part about the viability of a feminine literary aesthetic. This is perhaps not surprising given, as my earlier chapters begin to show, how persistently Ouida was trapped in gendered discourse that

marginalised her as an artist. *Friendship*, then, implies a fundamental pessimism about both the possibility of women freeing themselves from the gaze of the exploitative masculine eye and the acceptance in the real world of a theory of representation that incorporates women as serious artists, a pessimism that is ultimately illustrated by Ioris's complete destruction of Etoile's artistic life. Ioris is, the narrator explains, "attracted yet ... tantalised" by her independent artistic life and feels that "to make this woman know a human passion would be to draw her down to earth, and break her skyward-bearing wings, and yet he desired to do it—daily desired more and more" (196). The language that is used here—drawing Etoile "down to earth" and breaking her "sky-bearing wings"—belies a desire to crush the transcendence of her artistic representation; to bring her down to the "earth" (recall here the farming artefacts linked with Lady Joan) associated with realist representation. Ioris's success in destroying Etoile as an artist is resonant: where before "she had been able to summon spirits and angels at her will" (332)—language that again evokes the transcendence of her artistic project—she is ultimately "killed ... as an artist" (405). In the end, she is reduced to endlessly reproducing Ioris's face, an act that suggests women's entrapment in an economy in which, instead of having their own subjectivity, they are used by men as an other in which to see their own selves.

Ouida's pessimism may in part be strengthened by a realisation that not only does the literary aesthetic formulated in *Friendship* depend upon the very economy of the gendered gaze that marginalised women writers (as mentioned above, it is the very qualities associated with women's lack of subjectivity that are shown to mark their artistic superiority), but it does not escape the problems of dominance and exploitation associated with realist theory. In a sense, she is unable to present a truly alternative aesthetic; at best, it is a realist aesthetic in which the gaze is turned towards nature and a deliberate effort is made to minimise the exploitative impulses of that gaze. Turning the realist gaze towards nature (Etoile is, of course, first shown to the reader gazing at a sunset) certainly does provide opportunities for emphasising the magnitude of Etoile's sympathetic and sensitive mind. It takes an especially empathetic mind to see the sea smiling (194) and a modernised castle looking "profaned and disturbed" with "that air of resentment at its own profanation which ancient places do seem to wear under sacrilege, as though they were sentient things" (86). Moreover, in the case of inanimate objects there is no question of a potential subject to be destroyed. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see Etoile's aesthetic as a true alternative to the exploitative male gaze, at least as it is imagined in realist criticism. The anthropomorphism that sees human expressions in stone and castles actually follows the same logic as the masculine subject who sees



only his own subjectivity reflected in the figure of the feminine. This aesthetic consciousness is finally unable truly to configure a true alternative to the masculine subjectivity that relies upon the domination of a (feminine) object.

Still, if Ouida is pessimistic about the success of this feminine aesthetic strategy in *Friendship*, it should be said that her pessimism is balanced by her confident presentation of her own success at transcendent realism. Her explicit alignment of herself with Etoile makes the novel a proud declaration of her talents as a writer of superior fiction. Furthermore, the portrayal of transcendent realism that Ouida assigns herself in *Friendship* is clearly intended to inform the reception of that novel itself. Take the extended description of the Roman sunset—“that roseleaf warmth and soft transparency of flame-like colour which those who have looked on it never will forget so long as their lives shall last on earth” (10)—that occupies more than two paragraphs at the beginning of Chapter II. If Etoile’s appreciation of the Roman sunset is designed to show her superiority to realists like Lady Joan, then it follows that Ouida’s own description, as narrator, of the Roman sunset is intended to align that same transcendent realism with *Friendship* itself.

The “Avant-Propos” that prefaces the novel has a similar function. This preface outlines a version of the ancient Greek creation myth,

reformulated to mirror the plot of *Friendship*. Briefly, it describes Hermes fashioning the human ear, which “he hollowed and twisted ... in such a fashion that it should turn back all sounds except very loud blasts that Falsehood should blow on a brazen horn,” while “a fine cobweb that he stole from Arachne” stretched across it “would keep out all such whispers as Truth could send up from the depths of her well” (vii). However, Hermes forgets to make two ears, leaving Apollo to create the other one from “a pearl of the sea,” designed to allow “the voice of Truth” to “reach the brain” (viii). When Hermes angrily remarks upon Apollo’s work, Apollo tells him to “Be comforted,” for “The brazen trumpets will be sure to drown the whisper from the well, and ten thousand mortals to one, be sure, will always turn by choice your ear instead of mine” (viii). This ‘myth’ can be viewed as a metaphor for *Friendship* as a whole and the issues of representation and truth around which the plot revolves. The “brazen trumpets” of “Falsehood” in the Avant-Propos are clearly intended to allude to Lady Joan and the dominant realist view that she represents, while the “Truth” that they drown out invokes Etoile/Ouida and her particular novelistic aesthetic. By prefacing her novel with a Greek myth in this way, Ouida assigns her novel the epic sense of universal truth associated with Greek mythology. She lifts her story out of mere everyday fiction and injects it with a higher level of reality—that is, the

transcendental truth that, as I have discussed, was generally denied women in realism.

There is little sign that *Friendship*'s attempt to formulate a literary aesthetic that rewrote women's capacity for representation influenced the new direction in which fiction did, indeed, turn in the late nineteenth century. The modernism that grew out of mid-Victorian realism in the late nineteenth century and eventually came to dominate the novelistic aesthetic was, as many have argued, hugely misogynist. Yet *Friendship* remains significant as a text that straddles the transition between mid-Victorian realism and the fiction of the late nineteenth century. It reminds us of the contingent nature of these developments in the novel and gestures towards other ways in which the novel might have travelled. In endeavouring to respond to and shape the developing literary aesthetic in the second half of the nineteenth century, moreover, *Friendship* reveals Ouida to be not the unsophisticated hack that she has often been represented as, but a writer who was not only alert to contemporary literary forces but willing to adapt and innovate in significant and interesting ways. It is left to my final chapter to examine how Ouida responded to the changes in aesthetic theory in the later part of the century.

## Chapter Four: Aestheticism and Consumer Culture in *Princess*

### *Napraxine*

Ouida's novel *Princess Napraxine* is, like *Tricotrín*, a departure from her earlier fiction, notable in particular for its deployment of late nineteenth century aestheticism. It is also one of the few novels she wrote that has received significant contemporary critical attention. In this chapter, I examine *Princess Napraxine* as a response to male aesthetes' hidden link with consumer culture. More specifically, I argue that male aesthetes used women to obscure their link with the developing consumer culture of the nineteenth century and that in *Princess Napraxine* Ouida writes back against this strategy. In addition, I contend that Ouida's yoking of aestheticism and consumer culture signals a new acceptance of her own involvement in the marketplace that coexists with her assertion of artistic seriousness. This acceptance of her involvement in the new consumer culture is, however, tempered by uncertainty about its impact on literature, an ambivalence that is figured through the novel's deployment of two different models of femininity. My argument in this chapter expands upon work by Talia Schaffer, who has played an important role in recuperating Ouida as a female aesthete and who examines *Princess Napraxine's* situation within the discourses of gender and aestheticism.

By 1884 aestheticism had inspired a number of novelistic satires, including W. H. Mallock's *The New Republic* (1877), Walter Besant's and James Rice's *The Monks of Thelema* (1877), Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown* (1881), James's *Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and Robert Buchanan's *The Martyrdom of Madeline* (1882).<sup>71</sup> *Princess Napraxine*, which precedes more well-known aesthetic novels like Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), is, however, arguably the first British novel explicitly to utilise aestheticism as a serious literary technique.<sup>72</sup> This outwardly simple, if perhaps unexpected, claim is complicated by aestheticism's conceptual slipperiness. Even the period when aestheticism was supposed to exist is murky territory: it is most commonly associated with the late 1870s and 1880s but, depending on who is doing the defining, can be detected in the 1860s or even earlier, and is often extended into the 1890s and sometimes into the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> If locating the exact period in which aestheticism existed proves difficult, we might begin instead by compiling a list of the most frequently cited practitioners of aestheticism: the Pre-Raphaelites, Walter Pater, Swinburne, James McNeill Whistler, Oscar Wilde and William Morris, for a start. The diversity of these figures—who nonetheless constitute an inadequate roll-call for aestheticism, in part because, as will become more important later, women are completely excluded—immediately makes defining aestheticism

problematic. Ian Small's easy definition of aestheticism as the "Art for Art's Sake movement" (xi) or Peter Bürger's view of it as the "point" at which "the separation of art from the praxis of life" becomes its "content" (49), for example, fail to apply either to Morris, whose aestheticism was fundamentally entwined in his socialist philosophies, or to other philanthropic aesthetes such as those associated with the Kyrle Society.<sup>74</sup> Even Wilde was keenly aware of the social element of art, as his essay on the 'The Soul of Man under Socialism' makes clear. Likewise, if, as Diana Maltz points out, "[w]e most frequently associate the Aesthetic Movement with a series of artifacts and attitudes: blue and white china, peacocks feathers and lilies, an effeminate man or fragile woman rapturously or listlessly drooping over them" (20), to prescribe "Willean dandyism and preciousness" as "requisites for the aesthetic life" (21) is to erase the "divisions and alliances" that "lent the Victorian aesthetic life its vigor" (21). The view of aestheticism outlined by Maltz here may be more or less applicable to aesthetes like Wilde and Whistler (although it represents only one side of Wilde, at least), but it again fails to describe the socially engaged aestheticism of Morris, for example, or the theoretically nuanced aestheticism of Pater.

At the most basic level, definitions of aestheticism can be distilled into the idea of an intense appreciation of beauty and an artistic way of life.

Yet, as Ruth Z. Temple shows, this definition is so vague as to negate the concept of aestheticism as a distinct movement around the 1870s and 1880s (or 1890s), for it cannot be “demonstrated ... that the artists of the ‘80s and ‘90s” (Temple’s chosen period for aestheticism) “cared more for beauty than the artists of any other period.” If we are to escape Temple’s conclusion that “Aesthetic as a label for a literary movement had better be discarded” because “[t]here was no movement” (218), we might instead approach the problem by looking at how aestheticism was constructed as a unified phenomenon in the gaze of the Victorian public.<sup>75</sup>

When *Princess Napraxine* was published, four men in particular had been responsible for constructing aestheticism as a coherent movement: the caricaturist George Du Maurier, whose satires of aestheticism ran in *Punch* during the 1870s and early 1880s; the librettist W. S. Gilbert, whose comic opera *Patience* was a hit during the early 1880s; the critic Walter Hamilton, who in 1882 published a popular history of aestheticism, *The Aesthetic Movement in England*; and Wilde, who first delivered his own history of aestheticism in his lecture ‘The English Renaissance of Art’ the same year in New York. Together, these men helped to create a unified image of aestheticism that continues to shape the way that it is viewed today.

Du Maurier’s caricatures in *Punch* of limp, affected aesthetes were probably many Victorians’ first introduction to aestheticism. His aesthetes

are modelled on, amongst others, Swinburne, Wilde, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Whistler, and are characterised by the extreme seriousness with which they regard both art and themselves.<sup>76</sup> They use intense, exaggerated language and indulge in absurd raptures over objects like lilies and china. Du Maurier's 1880 cartoon 'The Six-Mark Tea-Pot' (Figure 1), which features Wilde as an "Æsthetic Bridegroom" whose "Intense Bride" urges him to "live up to" their teapot, is a typical example of his utilisation of these themes.

The aestheticism in Gilbert's opera closely follows Du Maurier's model. Gilbert's aesthetes are, like Du Maurier's, amalgams of Wilde, Swinburne, Rossetti and Whistler.<sup>77</sup> Like Du Maurier's aesthetes, too, Gilbert's aesthetes are characterised by their conceit (Grosvenor's despair at his "fatal perfection" (19) is a case in point) and a penchant for absurd artistic language, as evidenced, for example, by Lady Jane's declaration that, "There is a transcendentality of delirium—an acute accentuation of supremest ecstasy—which the earthy might easily mistake for indigestion. But it is *not* indigestion—it is aesthetic transfiguration!" (4). The aesthetes in *Patience* supplement this absurd language—which Lady Jane herself admits to be "babble" (4)—with an equally absurd aesthetic attachment to objects, perhaps best illustrated by Bunthorne's famous instructions to would-be aesthetes:



Then a sentimental passion of a vegetable fashion must excite your languid spleen,  
 An attachment *à la* Plato for a bashful young potato, or a not-too-French French bean! (13)

Like Du Maurier, then, Gilbert treats aestheticism entirely as a subject for satire.

Hamilton's response to Du Maurier and Gilbert is padded with lists and quotations and light on analysis, but it is nonetheless significant for treating seriously and giving more explicit shape to the idea of aestheticism formed in the satirical accounts. With the exception of Pater, who is not mentioned in the history, Hamilton's collection of aesthetes from the early 1880s is one that is familiar to us today. It begins with the Pre-Raphaelites and also includes Ruskin, Whistler, Swinburne, William Morris, William Michael Rossetti and Wilde. As far as the characteristics that Hamilton associates with aestheticism generally are concerned, many are similar to those lampooned by Du Maurier and Gilbert. For instance, Hamilton believes that aesthetes use a style of language that is shaped by a constant "yearning for the intense" and "tinged with somewhat exaggerated metaphor and "adjectives" that "are usually superlative—as supreme, consummate, utter, quite too preciously sublime, &c." (36). (Such language, he concedes, "unfortunately, easily lends itself to burlesque and absurd exaggeration" (20).) Hamilton emphasises the importance of interior decorating in

aestheticism, devoting an entire chapter to the homes of the aesthetes, which are replete with “Persian or Turkey rugs of various sizes and shapes” (119), Gobelins tapestries and Morris wallpapers, amongst other treasures. Also characteristic of aestheticism, according to Hamilton, is a penchant for medievalism (24, 31), Japanese art (24), and Queen Anne furniture (34), and the belief in “the correlation of the arts” (28). In painting, he identifies a particular aesthetic type of female beauty—“a pale distraught lady with matted dark auburn hair falling in masses over the brow” (24)—and in aesthetic poetry he sees a delight “in somewhat sensually-suggestive descriptions of the passions” (31) as typical. As far as a more general definition of aestheticism is concerned, Hamilton rather loosely defines aesthetes as “they who pride themselves upon having found out what is the really beautiful in nature and art, their faculties and tastes being educated up to the point necessary for the full appreciation of such qualities; whilst those who do not see the true and the beautiful—the outsiders in fact—are termed Philistines” (vii)—a definition that, of course, plainly does not fit at least one of the aesthetes he considers, Morris.



**Figure 2: The Six-Mark Tea-Pot**

*Æsthetic Bridegroom*, "It is quite consummate, is it not?"

*Intense Bride*. "It is, indeed! Oh, Algernon, let us live up to it!"

In contrast with Hamilton, Wilde was actually recognised as a practicing aesthete. The well-publicised lectures he gave in the United States and Britain in 1882 and 1883 attempted to define and give a history of the aesthetic movement in a more rigorous manner than had been attempted before. 'The English Renaissance of Art,' first delivered in New York in

1882, is Wilde's most detailed account of the history of aestheticism. Picking up on the notion of aestheticism as a passion for artistic beauty that shapes the way people live their lives, he characterises the movement by "its desire for a more gracious and comely way of life" and "its passion for physical beauty, its exclusive attention to form, its seeking for new subjects for poetry, new forms of art, new intellectual and imaginative enjoyments" (3). Like Hamilton, Wilde locates the origin of "the great romantic movement" (7) that constitutes his English Renaissance of art (which he reveals to be aestheticism (8, 17)) in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of 1847 and their later associates Edward Burne-Jones, Morris and Swinburne. Wilde cites the influence of Ruskin's "faultless and fervent eloquence" (9) on these aesthetes. In addition, Wilde adds another aesthete not mentioned by Du Maurier, Gilbert or Hamilton: Walter Pater. Wilde's use of Pater is unacknowledged, but his theory of aesthetic art is directly influenced by him, most notably in his argument for the need to appreciate art from a perspective that is separate from moral, political or religious concerns. Indeed, some passages in 'The English Renaissance of Art' appear to have been directly lifted from Pater's *The Renaissance*.<sup>78</sup>

Many of the ideas detailed in 'The English Renaissance of Art' are repeated in Wilde's other lectures; however, these lectures make several additional points about aestheticism that are worth mentioning. First, while

‘The English Renaissance of Art’ does not mention Whistler (who was, after all, American), Wilde describes him as the epitome of the aesthetic movement in his lectures ‘House Decoration’ (1882) and ‘Lecture to Art Students’ (1883). Second, lectures like ‘Art and the Handicraftsman’ and ‘House Decoration’ emphasise the importance of surrounding oneself with beautiful surroundings in mediums not traditionally associated with art, such as dress, jewellery and interior decoration. Finally, in ‘Art and the Handicraftsman’ Wilde acknowledges the link between aestheticism and “epigrams and paradoxes”—even if they are reserved for “those who love us not” (118). Wilde, of course, was by this time well known for his witticisms and epigrams.

The accounts of aestheticism proffered by Du Maurier, Gilbert, Hamilton and Wilde do not constitute the whole story of the way in which aestheticism was viewed by the Victorian public in the mid-1880s, of course, but they give a good overview of the main qualities associated with it and outline the major figures who were linked with it. Ouida’s own life had affinity with aestheticism as it was constructed by these men. As Talia Schaffer says in her essay ‘The Origins of the Aesthetic Novel: Ouida, Wilde, and the Popular Romance,’ “Ouida’s life, like her writing, was highly aesthetic,” a quality that was evident in everything from the drafts of her novels, which she wrote “in purple ink on large blue sheets of paper, while

sitting in a huge bed in an enormous room shrouded in black velvet curtains and filled with candles,” to her habit of spending “£100 to £200 a week on exotic flowers” (‘Origins’ 231). Ouida’s aesthetic practices also included miniature collecting, designing her own elaborate dresses (in one episode, she is described by Yvonne ffrench wearing a dress of “white satin garnished from head to foot with fresh violets” (95)), and ignoring freezing weather and flimsy clothes in order to gaze rapturously upon beautiful scenery.<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given this evident interest in aestheticism, *Princess Napraxine* is a response to that movement as it was constructed by Victorian commentators in the early 1880s. The eponymous heroine of the novel is a powerful female aesthete who, while she is, as I will discuss later on, the subject of significant ambivalence on Ouida’s part, is in many ways intended as an attractive character. Given Ouida’s own aesthetic life, there is good reason why the figure of the powerful female aesthete should appeal to her. In other words, the heroine of *Princess Napraxine* can, at least to some extent, be interpreted as an idealised realisation of Ouida’s own aesthetic aims.

The plot of the novel is a simple one. The novel’s eponymous heroine is an exquisitely beautiful, wealthy and complicated Russian princess who is married to an honest but stupid Russian prince. Rational to the point of coldness, her beauty and style attracts multitudes of male admirers who are a

source of malicious amusement to her. One of her suitors, Otho Othmar, is a Croatian multimillionaire who at the beginning of the novel has just returned from Asia, where he had fled after being rejected by the princess. When Princess Napraxine again rejects his romantic overtures—despite her apparent feelings for him—he rashly marries a beautiful girl, Yseulte de Valogne, the penniless orphan of an old aristocratic family. Othmar is unable to stifle his passion for Princess Napraxine, however, and his young wife detects his lack of love for her, although she hides her unhappiness. Meanwhile, Princess Napraxine’s husband, Platon, dies in a duel that he contracts in an attempt to impress her. The novel’s conclusion is brought about when a servant maliciously delivers Yseulte a letter intended for Othmar, written by the princess in reply to one of his love letters. Although the letter rejects Othmar’s overtures, Yseulte recognises that her marriage to Othmar prevents him from achieving happiness in marriage with the princess. She commits suicide, arranging it to look like an accident, and leaves Othmar free to remarry.

As an idealised female aesthete, Princess Napraxine’s “perfect taste” (396) surpasses that of every other character in the novel. In the manner satirised by Gilbert and Du Maurier but treated sympathetically by Hamilton and Wilde, her artistic tastes self-consciously infiltrate her entire lived life. She wears exotic, artistic dress, such as “skirts of India muslin, Flemish lace,

and primrose satin” (381) with “undulating waves and foam of lace” (399) and a “scarlet parasol large enough to shelter the dignity of any Chinese mandarin” (409). Her taste for artistic dress is particularly reminiscent of Wilde, who lectured and wrote essays on aesthetic dress and, like the princess, favoured exotic colours, styles and fabrics. (His costume in New York, for example, was described by one audience member as consisting of “A dark purple sack coat, and knee-breeches; black hose, low shoes with bright buckles; coat lined with lavender satin, a frill of rich lace at the wrists and for tie-ends over a low turn-down collar” together with “a circular cavalier cloak over the shoulder” (cited in Ellmann 164).) Princess Napraxine’s “great love of beauty” (417-8) also extends to her surroundings, which she decorates in artistic superb style. Echoing Hamilton’s chapter on aesthetes’ houses in *The Aesthetic Movement in England*, her rooms have “ivory” furniture, hangings made of “silvery satin embroidered with pale roses and apple-blossoms,” a ceiling painted by Baudry “with the story of Ædon and Procris,” “milk white” windows and a floor “covered with white bearskins” (691).

Princess Napraxine’s insistence on an aesthetic life is emphasised in the opening pages of the novel, in which she expresses her dislike of a house on the French Riviera that she has just rented. Her taste is offended by both the house’s inelegant juxtaposition of artistic styles—it is, she claims, an



“extraordinary jumble” of “every style under the heaven”—and the unattractive coverings on the palm trees on the estate (they look as though “they had neuralgia” (373)). She also wonders if the orange tones of the house are “good for one’s complexion” (374) and tells her admirer Geraldine to take a bamboo chair because “That china stool does not suit your long legs at all” (377). This sense in which every piece of decoration is aesthetically significant, no matter how small or seemingly irrelevant for artistic consideration, evokes that aesthetic taste alternately satirised by Du Maurier in his caricatures of aesthetes mooning over teapots or taken seriously by Wilde when he objects to paintings of “romantic moonlight landscape[s]” and “sunsets” on “dinner-plates or dishes” (‘Handicraftsman’ 110).

There is other evidence that Ouida was aligning the aestheticism in *Princess Napraxine* with Wilde. This can be seen, for example, in the princess’s irreverent reduction of all value to aesthetic value, such as when she describes her preference for death by guillotine on the basis that, “dynamite doesn’t do much for us” because “When one goes into the air without warning in little bits, in company with the plaster of the ceiling, or the skin of the carriage horses, or the stuffing of the railway-carriage, there is not much room for heroism” (383). The impact of Princess Napraxine’s speech is of course derived from the way in which her preference for dying in an aesthetically pleasing way nonchalantly dismisses the horror of death.

A similarly absurdist exaltation of aesthetic value is characteristic of Wilde, who famously declared, for example, that “I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china” (cited in Belford 49). This statement was being reported widely as early as the late 1870s, and, as we have seen, by 1880 had found its way into Du Maurier’s ‘The Six-Mark Tea-Pot.’ Indeed, as if to make the connection even more explicit, the princess’s friend Lady Brancepeth openly links her with Wilde when, in response to the former’s aesthetic objections to La Jacquemerille, she states that “no doubt, it is utterly wrong, and would give Oscar Wilde a sick headache” (376).

Ouida’s link with Wilde has been observed by Schaffer, one of the few scholars to examine her in any depth. As I briefly noted in the Introduction, Schaffer’s attention to Ouida is part of a wider project of recuperating women’s participation in British aestheticism. With the exception of Linda K. Hughes, who in the mid-1990s coined the term “female aesthete” and explicitly linked the poet Graham R. Tomson (Rosamund Marriott Watson) with the aesthetic movement, prior to the publication of Schaffer’s and Kathy Alexis Psomiades’s volume *Women and British Aestheticism* (1999) and Schaffer’s *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late Victorian England* (2000) literary scholars mostly described aestheticism as a male movement.<sup>80</sup> This perspective echoes the descriptions of aestheticism given by contemporary spokesmen like Du

Maurier, Gilbert, Wilde (in his official lectures, at least) and Hamilton, for whom women's participation in aestheticism is largely limited to admiring the products of their male consorts. In their introduction to *Women and British Aestheticism*, however, Schaffer and Psomiades claim that, despite the almost exclusive focus on male aesthetes in critical discussion of aestheticism, "women writers and artists contributed to aestheticism" at "every stage" (3) from the 1860s to the early twentieth century. The essays in their volume analyse a wide variety of women through the lens of aestheticism, including novelists like Lucas Malet and Marie Corelli, poets like Christina Rossetti and Tomson, and writers of prose like the garden writer Gertrude Jekyll.

The thesis of *Women and British Aestheticism* is expanded in Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*. In this monograph, Schaffer again argues that "the world of women" constitutes the "missing half of aestheticism." Critiquing the idea that "[a]esthetic techniques and ideas" were "limited to a small clique" (2), she identifies two loose aesthetic traditions in the second half of the nineteenth century. On one hand, she describes the dominant view of aestheticism, which regards the *Yellow Book* as "the central journal of the movement" (1) and focuses on the work of male aesthetes like Aubrey Beardsley, Max Beerbohm, Hubert Crackenthorpe, Ruskin and Pater. On the other hand, however, Schaffer detects an

alternative aesthetic tradition, headed by Wilde and his magazine *Woman's World*, that—Wilde's failure to incorporate women aesthetes into histories of the movement like 'The English Renaissance of Art' notwithstanding—was “popular, based in material culture, and interested in alternative gender behaviors” (2). If we pay attention to this cultural phenomenon, Schaffer argues, “[a]esthetics becomes a movement centered upon women, designed for a female readership, passionately concerned with women's political and literary choices at the end of the nineteenth-century” (2). In her attempt to uncover this alternative aesthetic tradition, Schaffer examines women aesthetes who include Vernon Lee, the late nineteenth century novelist Elizabeth von Armin, Tomson, the fashion writer Mary Eliza Haweis, the poet and essayist Alice Meynell, and, of course, Ouida.

As I have already indicated in the Introduction, Schaffer sees Ouida's role in the aesthetic movement as a significant one, arguing that the dandies in novels like *Strathmore*, *Chandos* and *Tricotrín* “prefigure ... the golden lads, the Dorians, of male homoerotic fiction” (124) by male aesthetes like Wilde. Schaffer also contends that Ouida “pioneered a new form of discourse” (124): the epigrammatic narrative that was to become central to later aesthetic novels of authors such as George Meredith, Wilde and Huysmans (122). To support this claim, Schaffer cites the many epigrams that increasingly occupy Ouida's novels in the 1880s, such as “Let us be

robbed of everything except our illusions” (cited in Schaffer 137) from *Princess Napraxine*, or “Moralists say that a soul should resist passion. They might as well say that a house should resist an earthquake” (cited in Schaffer 137) from *Guilderoy*, or, from *Othmar*: “Love is best worked with egotism, as gold is worked with alloy” (cited in Schaffer 138). Ouida’s epigrams are, Schaffer argues, characterised by “the familiar inverted structure of the Wildean bon mot” and they are “spoken by leisured, attractive, refined cosmopolites who surround themselves by culture” (138). Their content also, like Wilde’s, “debunks the Victorian idealization of work, duty, marriage, and love” (138). In her essay ‘The Origins of the Aesthetic Novel: Ouida, Wilde, and the Popular Romance,’ Schaffer claims that the “condensed and inverted structure” of Ouida’s epigrams was “adopted” by “Wilde and the other aesthetes” so “completely” that “the fact that she had developed it first” was “obscure[d]” (223).

As I have also already indicated, Schaffer regards *Princess Napraxine* and Ouida’s 1883 play *Afternoon* (from the collection *Frescoes*) as particularly significant in the production of this epigrammatic aesthetic narrative and analyses them as responses to male aestheticism. She argues that *Afternoon*, which features two male aesthetes, critiques the male “aesthete’s tendency to objectify women” (135). This is evident, for example, in the character of Earl L’Estrange, who “formalize[s] his own

past” in a way that allows him to negate “his cruelty to his young wife” (134). Like Dorian Gray, who “a decade later ... regards Sibyl Vane’s death as merely a marvelous tragedy” (134), L’Estrange thinks of his relationship with Claire as a story in a novel or a play that causes him to have “a nightmare, dreaming the history was mine” (cited in Schaffer 134). However, two female characters, Claire Glyon and her friend Laura, resist the gaze of the male aesthetic connoisseur, utilising “a kind of verbal productivity” that functions as a “weapon against the connoisseur’s objectifying gaze” (135). *Afternoon* thus critiques male aestheticism while simultaneously creating a place in aestheticism for women.

Schaffer argues that Ouida uses the same tactic in *Princess Napraxine*, published the following year. In this novel, “men continue to use connoisseurship in the objectifying manner we saw in *Afternoon*” (142). Again, however, the “male connoisseur’s appraising eye is no match for the female aesthete’s rapid tongue” (143) and the novel’s eponymous heroine “cannot be objectified because she is constantly talking about herself, her psychology, her wishes, her curious talents” (143). This “mastery of language enables her to enunciate her own character or, in other words, to externalize her own interiority” (143). Thus Othmar’s desire “to stare at her delicate ivory beauty ... is frustrated by her decision to ‘speak ... idly of this

thing and of that” (143). In this way, the female aesthete confounds the male aesthete’s attempts to objectify her.

Schaffer’s account is an admirable one, and her description of the way in which Ouida demands a place for accomplished female aestheticism while challenging male aestheticism is especially valuable. I would, however, modify Schaffer’s account of Ouida’s influence on Wilde. While she provides good evidence that the content and style of the epigrams in *Dorian Gray* and Wilde’s comedies were influenced by Ouida’s fiction (‘Origins’ 222-4), it is likely that the influence was mutual. In 1884, Wilde was not only a well-known figure on the aesthetic scene but was already famous for his epigrammatic wit (his notebook at the time, in which he was now recording phrases for future use, included witticisms like “Pour écrire il me faut du satin jaune” and “La poésie c’est la grammaire idéalisée” (cited in Ellmann 214)). Ouida’s decision to make epigrammatic language such an integral part of *Princess Napraxine*, together with the other ways in which, as I have discussed, she invokes Wilde, suggests that she was consciously aligning the princess’s brand of aestheticism with him.

More interestingly, Schaffer’s argument about gender and aestheticism in *Princess Napraxine* can be productively expanded by taking into account its treatment of consumer culture, an exercise that offers insight into not only Ouida’s novel but the intersection between gender, consumer

culture and aestheticism in late nineteenth century Britain. *Princess Napraxine* was, importantly, situated at a period when economic culture was undergoing a massive shift, a shift that, in turn, as I will argue, crucially marked the particular form taken by late nineteenth century aestheticism. This shift can be witnessed, at the most general level, in the unprecedented rise in consumption that took place in the nineteenth century, a rise that can be seen in, amongst other spheres, the literary marketplace in which aestheticism was produced. Alexis Weedon describes how “from 1876 to 1886 there was ... a sharp increase in the quantity of books produced” (49) and lists as evidence of this rise sample figures of the number of books produced by six major publishers, including Blackwood, Chatto and Windus and Macmillan. Her figures show that the number of titles produced by these publishers leapt from a total of 267 in 1856 to 779 in 1876 and 947 in 1886 (by 1896, there had been an even more rapid rise to 1690) (24). This growth in the number of books was accompanied by a decrease in the purchasing price of books: while total retail output grew from an estimated £273.12 million in 1866 and £296.74 million in 1876 to £391.20 million in 1886, the retail price per book dropped from £35.06 per 100 in 1866 to £24.65 per 100 in 1886 (Weedon 55). The decreasing cost of books meant they were increasingly accessible to consumers, whose average wages as well as literacy rates were continuing to rise (Weedon 51). All this naturally meant a



significant increase in the size of the reading market. By 1884, if the market for fiction could not yet quite be labelled “mass,” it was well on the way there and had been for some time.

Statistics may show how consumption increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, but they cannot convey the change in economic culture that more generally affected the Victorian public during that period. In *The Romantic Ethic and Modern Consumerism*, Colin Campbell describes the spirit or ethic of modern consumerism as “self-illusory hedonism,” a modern form of the hedonistic search for pleasure. It is “self-illusory” because what becomes central in modern consumption is the imaginative fantasy that is built around commodities: in Campbell’s words, “individuals do not so much seek satisfaction from products, as pleasure from their associated meanings” so that “[t]he essential activity of consumption is thus not the actual selection, purchase or use of products, but the imaginative pleasure-seeking to which the product image lends itself.” This in turn leads to the desire for novelty—“[t]he modern consumer will desire a novel rather than a familiar product because this enables him to believe that its acquisition and use can supply experiences which he has not so far encountered in reality” (89)—and a never-ending cycle of anticipation and disappointment as the desired commodity fails to supply the imagined pleasure. According to Campbell, this attitude was first developed by the

Romantic movement at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries—rather ironically, we might add, given that Romanticism was a movement that explicitly rejected materialism—before shaping consumer culture (and, as I will later outline in more detail, aestheticism) more generally.

The nineteenth century saw the beginning of modern consumer culture proper as there took place what Rachel Bowlby describes as “a radical shift in the concerns of industry: from production to selling and from the satisfaction of stable needs to the invention of new desires” (2). Modern consumer culture was fostered in the nineteenth century by a number of important developments, including developments in shopping and advertising.<sup>81</sup> The rise of the department store in the second half of the nineteenth century, pioneered by William Whiteley in the late 1860s and 1870s, transformed shopping into “a new bourgeois leisure activity”; a place where “[p]eople could now come and go, to look and dream, perchance to buy” (Bowlby 4).<sup>82</sup> This dream world invokes the fantasy involved in modern consumer culture theorised by Campbell, while the seemingly limitless supply of different commodities on display in these stores catered to, and created, the insatiable desire for novelty that Campbell also describes. At around the same time, as Lori Anne Loeb discusses, an “unparalleled advertising craze” (5) took place (the date Loeb gives is between 1850 and

1880), during which advertisements become far more sophisticated, “employ[ing] stunning illustrations reproduced with meticulous care and artistry” and using “inventively persuasive, even sensational” text that was “no longer bound by the tiresome printing conventions that had dictated justified columns and uniform type” (7). During this period, the advertisement shifted, as Loeb tellingly puts it, from being “a creature of need to being a creature of fantasy” (7), a statement that again evokes Campbell’s theories about the link between fantasy and consumption. At the same time, the kinds of things that were advertised expanded from “a small range of products by a few well-publicized producers” at mid-century to a wide range of commodities that “reflect[ed] extensive brand-name differentiation and an increasing interest in innovation, novelty, and luxury” (7). In this way, advertisements, like the array of goods on display in department stores, helped to create and maintain consumers’ ever-expanding desire for new goods.

These developments in consumer culture in the second half of the nineteenth century were pervasive, and literature, which like all commodities is produced in the marketplace, could hardly be immune to them.<sup>83</sup> Aestheticism’s connection with consumer culture exists most obviously in what Freedman describes as “aestheticism’s valorizing of aesthetic connoisseurship” (54): the taste for artefacts like blue china, Japanese art,

Queen Anne furniture and exotic clothing that was mocked by aestheticism's detractors but promoted by aesthetes like Wilde. For all the artistic intensity that aesthetes endowed such objects, connoisseurship—the purchase and collection of art commodities—is at bottom nothing more than a form of aesthetic consumption. Connoisseurship was, however, only one part of aesthetes' engagement with consumer culture. As Wilde shows, the aesthete's connoisseurship simultaneously produced *himself* as a commodity—or, perhaps more accurately, as an advertisement for the products that he was marketing. In the words of Sarah Burns, “[t]he public self, the socially constructed personality” of the aesthete “was an attention-getting and salable item when translated into copy for the publishing industry” (36). This aspect of aestheticism, which mirrors the boom in advertising that was taking place in the marketplace more generally, can be seen particularly clearly in Whistler. Just as Wilde's public persona as an aesthete gave him an audience for first his poetry and then his lectures and plays, Whistler cultivated his aesthetic self in order to market his art. In her essay ‘Old Maverick to Old Master: Whistler in the Public Eye in Turn-of-the-Century America,’ Burns discusses Whistler's advertisement of his aesthetic self in detail (she focuses on the United States, but her arguments apply equally well to Britain). “In a large degree,” Burns claims, Whistler

became one of the ‘greatest’ artists of his time *because* he ... was ... the most ruthlessly competitive, the most successful self-advertiser, the one who had fashioned the most attention-getting and enduringly interesting brand name (complete with the butterfly, and other trademark symbols) for himself and his art products. (39)

Thus, “[a]s an artist offered up for public consumption, Whistler (and his press) promoted his status as entertainer, a role that required a signature appearance (‘stage clothes’ and grooming) as well as performing ability” (32). Whistler’s aesthetic appearance is well-known and included walking sticks of exaggerated length (Fleming 226) and “one conspicuous white lock” of hair which famously hung “dead center and front” (Fleming 159) of his head. He also engaged in theatrical behaviour that included fistfights, very public lawsuits, verbal repartee and “an exaggerated laugh” (Fleming 215).

Aestheticism’s deep involvement in the developing consumer culture can be seen elsewhere. In her essay ‘On the Insatiability of Human Wants: Economic and Aesthetic Man,’ Regenia Gagnier traces the shift in economic theory in the second half of the nineteenth century from an emphasis on production to an emphasis on consumption. She describes how theorists in the 1870s like Stanley Jevons and Carl Menger endeavoured to rationalise economics and remove subjective value judgements from it. Not only did these theorists define labour as simply another commodity, but all commodities came to be considered equivalent to each other to the extent

that their value (or ‘utility’) was produced entirely by consumer demand. Moral judgements about the nature of consumer desire were believed to be redundant because it was denied that “one subject’s desires or needs could be compared with another’s” (137). As Jevons wrote in 1871, “Every mind is ... inscrutable to every other mind, and no common denominator of feeling seems to be possible” (cited in Gagnier 138). The result of this “evisceration of substantive value in all areas” (Gagnier 143) was an emphasis on individual choice and self-interest. Menger and Jevons consequently theorise that “[s]ince human wants are theoretically insatiable, humankind finds itself inevitably in conditions of scarcity”; the result of this scarcity is an economy in which “self-interest dictates that each fights to secure her own requirements to the exclusion of others” (141). Quantity of individual desire thus becomes the only measure that is relevant for economics when considering the acquisition of goods.

Gagnier traces crucial aspects of the economic theory of Menger and Jevons in the writing of Pater, who was probably the most influential theorist of the aesthetic movement. For example, she finds in Pater “the denial of absolute value and the demand for quantification” (145) evident in neo-classical economic theory as well as an emphasis on individual impressions and even solipsism (“an inner life subjective to the point of solipsism” (146)). She also locates in his writing the notion that “literary art is

*subjective*, involving *choices* (preferences) and desire (volition)” (147). Indeed, Gagnier goes so far as to describe how Pater’s writing “suggests how scarcity amid abundance leads to a preoccupation with form in aesthetic matters, as it led to formalism in twentieth-century economics” (146). Although Gagnier concedes that ultimately Pater was unwilling to deny “substantive value” (148), the outline of neoclassical economic theory is evident in his highly influential writing.<sup>84</sup>

Pater’s emphasis on individualism and the negation of moral concerns, two key elements of the new, consumption-oriented economic theory that I have outlined here, can be traced elsewhere in British aestheticism. Elsie B. Adams notes how Whistler and Pater both “insist on the artist’s vision as the sole determiner of the kind of reality his art will express” and regard “the artist’s temperament, not his age,” as “the sole source of artistic inspiration” (39). In this way, then, Whistler echoes Pater’s espousal of individualism. Likewise, Adams notes Whistler’s well-known championing of “the divorce of morality from art” (36), a promotion of art for art’s sake that can be observed in the aesthetic theory of other aesthetes (Swinburne in particular). As I indicated earlier, Pater was also an obvious influence on Wilde, who has often been described as a populariser of Pater’s ideas.<sup>85</sup> Michael Patrick Gillespie, for instance, describes how the doctrine of “New Hedonism” in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* “asserts the primacy of a

doctrine of pleasure that absolves individuals from the ordinary responsibilities of their actions” and thus “privileges the affiliation of ethics and aesthetics in a manner that parallels *Marius the Epicurean*” (145). Here again the privileging of individual choice and disregard of moral content that characterises contemporary economic theory surfaces in aestheticism.

Aestheticism, then, was intimately connected with the developing consumer culture of the late nineteenth century. In this thesis, I have discussed the growing opposition to popular art that accompanied the development of high art in the second half of the nineteenth century. Since aestheticism at its very base called for art to be treated with the utmost seriousness, its association with consumer culture was highly problematic in the face of growing anxiety about popular art. This anxiety is identified by Alison Victoria Matthew, who examines how “aesthetes scorned the indiscriminate consumerism and gaudy tastes of the lower classes”; and if “aestheticism itself was but an elite form of consumerism ... it attempted to conceal the agency of the buyer” (181). The aesthetic connoisseur, that is, distanced himself from the vulgar consumption of the marketplace by ascribing transcendent, artistic values to his consumption. Whistler is again a useful case in point. As Burns points out, his overt link with the marketplace was covered up by the promise of “spirituality and essence” that “seemed paradoxically to open out avenues of escape from the rising materialism that



so worried thinkers of the time” (39). Whistler’s paintings were successful, in other words, precisely because they seemed to embody values that were alien to the marketplace.

What is particularly significant for my argument is that aesthetes’ distancing of themselves from the marketplace had an important gendered component. That is, at the same time that male aesthetes were inextricably linked with consumer culture, they denied that link and displaced it onto women. In her article titled ‘Fashioning Aestheticism by Aestheticizing Fashion: Wilde, Beerbohm, and the Male Aesthetes’ Sartorial Codes,’ Schaffer discusses how male aesthetes, characterised by greater or lesser degrees of misogyny, distinguished their connoisseurship from women’s consumption. Aesthetic interior decorators such as Charles Eastlake, the author of the aesthetic decorating manual *Hints on Household Taste* (1868), or members of the Arts and Crafts movement, for example, “distinguished themselves from the women whose advice manuals already dominated the field of domestic arts” by “praising craft objects which boasted an antiquarian or exotic provenance—particularly medieval or Asian artifacts.”<sup>86</sup> Their explicit attempt to distance themselves from women’s consumption is evident in Eastlake’s argument “that women had no natural taste and were too stubborn to learn” (40). Similarly, in the case of aesthetic fashion (fashion, of course, is linked with women, but also with consumer

culture), male aesthetes “borrowed colors, styles, fabrics, and accessories from the women’s sphere, but reformulated them in the language of scholarship, insisting that their clothes were readable by trained connoisseurs and contain[ed] valuable historical and aesthetic information” (42). Even Wilde, who, as Schaffer argues, was comparatively open about his appropriation of women’s culture, ascribed his fashions a deeper historical meaning, so that his “long curls” became “his ‘Neronian coiffure,’” his “satin coat and shoebuckles refer to Gainsborough and Reynolds portraits” and his “breeches, stockings, and lace collar” allude to “the controversial trend towards historically correct costume in Shakespeare productions” (45). This historical and aesthetic meaning not only distinguished male aesthetes from women, but ascribed to their consumption transcendent qualities that distanced it from the marketplace.

*Princess Napraxine* registers, and critiques, aestheticism’s displacement of its involvement with consumer culture onto women. Consumer culture is an aspect of the novel with which Schaffer does not engage to any significant extent, although she does hint at the way in which commodification is implicated in aestheticism’s representation of gender when she describes the male aesthetic gaze as something that objectifies women. She also, as I have mentioned above, links women’s aestheticism generally with material culture, but while she examines interior decorators

and fashion writers in the context of aestheticism she does not explore the ramifications of this engagement with material culture in detail. *Princess Napraxine*, however, not only writes back against aestheticism's gender politics, but strikingly and overtly reveals the involvement of both of aestheticism and gender in the developing consumer culture of the nineteenth century.

First of all, *Princess Napraxine* exposes the deep involvement in consumption that, as I have argued, male aesthetes attempted to deny. Princess Napraxine is, of course, universally desired by men, who are attracted by her bewitching beauty of "face and form," her "infinite grace and an intricate alternation of vivacity and languor" that they find "irresistible" (375). Her skin, which is "like the petals of a narcissus in its perfect *mat* whiteness," her "Oriental eyes of a blue-black" and her teeth "like pearls" (375) attract the desiring male gaze in a similar way to the beautiful women who recur in the work of aesthetes like Rossetti and Swinburne. In particular, the manner in which her body is broken up into beautiful features mirrors aesthetic poetry's fetishism of the hair, eyes and lips of its beautiful female subjects. Swinburne's description of Lucrezia Borgia in *Poems and Ballads* is one of many examples:

Whose hair was as gold raiment on a king,  
Whose eyes were as the morning purged with flame,  
Whose eyelids as sweet savour issuing thence ('Death' 68-70)

Like Lucrezia, whose body is separated into hair, eyes and eyelids for the admiration of the male narrator, Princess Naparaxine's body is broken up into beautiful eyes, ears, teeth, and skin for the delectation of her male admirers.

The aestheticising gaze affixed on the princess by the male characters is, of course, the gaze against which Schaffer describes Ouida writing back, enlisting the witty language of the female aesthete to resist the male aesthete's attempt at female objectification. Yet it might also be considered in light of Jean Baudrillard's theorisation of the postmodern world that emerges at "the end of production," when the dominance of the sign over reality (or the "hyperreal") means that people themselves come to function like commodities.<sup>87</sup> In Princess Napraxine the gaze of the male aesthetes also commodifies its human subjects. The commodification implicit in this gaze, a desire that focuses solely on external beauty, is baldly described at two places in the novel. The first of these is when the narrator describes how the princess's husband, Platon Napraxine, successfully courts her. The young princess at first rejects Platon's suit because he "was stupid, had a Kalmuck face, and was inclined to be corpulent,—in a word, displeased her taste in every way" (390). However, her mother dismisses these objections, telling her daughter that "that sort of details [sic] does not matter ... in a question of

the kind we are discussing” (390). It is not love that the princess should consider, her mother urges, but the fact that “he will never get to the bottom of his salt-mines and ruby-mines” (390). Princess Napraxine’s father, too, “wished passionately for the acceptance of Napraxine” because “he himself was deeply in debt and knew that his constitution had the germs of a mortal disease” (391). When Princess Napraxine is eventually convinced by her parents to marry Platon, then, she participates in a business transaction in which her beautiful body is exchanged for her husband’s riches. Indeed, the novel hints at the way in which this exchange resembles prostitution when it describes the shock the innocent princess undergoes when, forced to have sexual intercourse with her new husband, she learns the true nature of the marriage transaction (390).

The commercial nature of Princess Napraxine’s marriage, together with its alignment with aestheticism, is later stated even more clearly towards the end of the novel. Comparing herself with the rest of Platon’s toys, the princess muses that, “I have certainly been the most expensive whim that he has ever had; and he has never got the slightest entertainment out of me” (688). She describes the status that his purchase of her bestows upon him, noting that “he has a kind of triumph in possessing” her, for “when they all look after me in the Bois, or at the Opera, he likes to think I belong to him. As somebody said, when people admire what is ours, it is as if

they admired us” (688). The princess then carries the metaphor further, comparing herself with “the *bleu ciel* Sèvres for which [their acquaintance Lord Dudley] gave ten thousand pounds”:

The Sèvres is of no earthly use to him, and he would scarcely dare to touch it, and he would certainly never eat his *salmi* or have his venison served on it; but it is something that everybody envied him, that nobody else has. When Platon gives great dinners to sovereigns and all kinds of *gros bonnets*, and I am opposite to him, I am sure he has the sort of feeling that Lord Dudley has about that *bleu ciel* service. (688-9)

The uselessness at which the commodities described in this passage have arrived can, according to Richards, “stand as an emblem of ... late-Victorian commodity culture.”<sup>88</sup> It is thus particularly resonant that Princess Napraxine should be described a page earlier as “a hot-house flower” of “utter and entire uselessness” (687). What is more, the item that functions to symbolise Princess Napraxine’s commodity uselessness in the passage above is no other than blue china. Blue china was, as most readers will be familiar, especially associated with aesthetic connoisseurship, and was a craze that was started first by Dante Gabriel Rossetti before being popularised by Whistler and eventually taken up by Wilde. By associating the commodifying gaze of Princess Napraxine’s wooers with blue china, Ouida thus makes a firm link between male aestheticism and consumer culture at the same time that she emphasises the presence of women’s bodies in this economy.

These issues are especially evident in Princess Napraxine's interaction with Othmar. Othmar is the inheritor of a multi-million business empire and the "stroke" of his "pen" can "give away millions with as much ease as lesser mortals can scatter pence" (432). As this suggests, he is used to his money getting him the things that he wants—including women, who, the narrator says, "had succumbed to him as full-blown roses fall before the touch of a careless hand" (441). Princess Napraxine is the sole exception: "She was," the narrator says, "the only living person who could say to this man, who could have purchased souls and bodies as he could have purchased strings of unpierced pearls if he had chosen, 'You desire something of which you will never be master'" (554). The way in which this insatiable desire is shaped by consumer culture is made particularly clear in an episode in which some guests at a dinner hosted by the Duchess de Vannes discuss Othmar's passion for the princess. An old diplomat gives his views on the matter in an anecdote about a "collector of miniatures" whom he once knew. The collector's collection, which "had taken him thirty-five years and more millions to make what it was," included the "finest examples" of "Every admirable miniaturist whom the world has possessed," with the sole exception of a "German miniaturist of the sixteenth century" called Karl Huth. After having "hunted North and South Germany" for "thirty-five years," he finally discovers "an undeniable Karl Huth, in the family of a

tradesman at Griefenhagen.” However, the burgomaster refuses to sell him the miniature, despite being “offered sums untold.” This puts the miniature collector in “such an excess of rage and despair that it brought on gout and killed him in an inn ... all because with three thousand five hundred miniatures he failed to acquire one obscure example.” Princess Napraxine, the diplomat concludes,

is the Karl Huth of Othmar. He is one of those men who can command and enjoy everything; therefore, of course, he has set his heart on the only woman, probably, in Europe who will not smile on him. All his grand collection became worthless to my poor friend when once he failed to include in it that single Karl Huth. (443)

Ouida’s use of the miniature collector’s desire for a Karl Huth as a metaphor for Othmar’s desire for Princess Napraxine reveals both the consumerism associated with his gaze and its connection with aestheticism. The miniature collector is of course a collector of *artistic* commodities, a practice that aligns him with the connoisseurship of the aesthetes and their collections of art and china. In this tale, however, the miniature collector’s desire is clearly impelled less by the aesthetic qualities of the Karl Huth miniature itself than the desire that is aroused both by its absence from his collection and the fact that it is withheld from him (he contrasts with the burgomaster, who values it for “some fable in his family about it” (443)—or, we might say, for the way in which it affirms the bonds of kinship). The unquenchable desire that each addition to the collector’s collection fails to satisfy is clearly reminiscent of



Campbell's description of modern consumer culture, in which an insatiable desire remains unsatisfied despite the acquisition of commodity after commodity. Ouida's use of the metaphor of the miniature collector thus again links aestheticism and consumer desire with Othmar's attraction to Princess Napraxine.

In addition to exposing both male aesthetes' involvement in consumer culture and the way in which this involvement is channelled through women's bodies, *Princess Napraxine* registers another characteristic aspect of male aesthetes' use of women: the way in which they use women's bodies to obscure their involvement in consumer culture.<sup>89</sup> This aspect of aestheticism has been discussed by Kathy Alexis Psomiades in *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism*. According to Psomiades, "[i]n aestheticism, femininity allows for the difficult and vexed relation between the categories of the aesthetic and the economic to be represented and covered over by erotic relations" (3). Femininity, she argues, is "a discursive field admirably suited to the figuration of contradiction, of two sides of the same question, even of ideological self-contradiction." This embodiment of contradiction is evident in the way in which "a single woman might be at the same moment both 'good' and 'bad,' both lovely and monstrous," a situation that "does not seem to us to be an impossible contradiction but rather a paradoxical truism" (32). In aestheticism, then,

femininity “manage[s] the contradictions between artistic autonomy on the one hand and art’s necessary commodification on the other” (33). To illustrate this, Psomiades analyses several aesthetic texts, including Rossetti’s poem ‘Jenny.’ Jenny, the prostitute who is the central figure of this poem, “brings together the realms of art and economics in a single beautiful body” (39). On one hand, she is described as both “the prostitute who sells her body” and as a book, “the material commodity object that may be bought and sold.” Simultaneously, however, she is a “mysterious soul that cannot be compromised” (40) and, in the book metaphor, “the text whose meaning may not be bought with money” (40-1). In this way, Rossetti’s poem uses femininity simultaneously to “evoke purchasability and pricelessness, economic value and a realm of other values” (42). The contradiction of aestheticism’s engagement with the marketplace is thus shifted to the realm of femininity, where it is managed and obscured. This trajectory, Psomiades argues, characterises British aestheticism.

As in Psomiades’s model, the men in *Princess Napraxine* use women to obscure their participation in consumer culture. However, this concealment is carried out in a much more direct way in Ouida’s novel than in the texts analysed by Psomiades. If, as I have discussed, the gaze that the men in the novel fix on the body of the princess is a commodifying gaze, they simultaneously use her body to pretend that that gaze is instead impelled

by an appreciation of aesthetic values that transcend consumerism. The way in which the men in *Princess Napraxine*, like aesthetes such as Whistler, evade their involvement in the world of consumption can be seen most readily in the character of Othmar, whose passion for the princess is described in far more detail than that of any of her other suitors. In the same way that art is often ascribed a value that transcends the values of the marketplace, for instance, Othmar sees the princess as nullifying the demands of the material world. She could, he feels, “have moved him to any sacrifice, she could have compensated him for any loss” (416), and, he tells her, if she had accepted his love, “I would lend you nothing ... I would have given you everything” (424). In other words, the material losses and gains of the commercial world become meaningless next to her. Othmar also sees Princess Napraxine as an antidote to the solipsism that, as discussed earlier, is characteristic of modern consumer culture: “she alone,” the narrator says, “seemed to him to fill the vacant places, to smile across the solitary room” (432).<sup>90</sup> Elsewhere, Othmar regards Princess Napraxine as the cure for the “moral isolation” of “the empty place which no powers or vanities of the world could fill” (542). Princess Napraxine’s superiority to the consolations of consumer culture is here implied by her superiority to the “vanities of the world”—that is, commodities.

Princess Napraxine, however, refuses to allow male connoisseurs to obscure the commodified nature of their aesthetic consumption. The epigrammatic language that, according to Schaffer, enables her to resist the male aesthete simultaneously denies these men the luxury of obscuring the way in which they function in an economy governed by commodity culture. For instance, Princess Napraxine deflates Othmar's repeated attempts to downplay the significance of cash by representing himself as unenthusiastic about his fortune, "even occasionally ashamed of it" (432). She does this by incessantly foregrounding his purchasing power. In one episode, her habit of stressing his fortune incites him to ask, "Cannot you forbear to quote my millions? .... You would not reproach a hunchback with his hump" (404). The princess responds by telling him, "You think money is not interesting ... but you are wrong. It is the Haroun al-Raschid of our day. It is the wand of Mercury. It is the sunshine of life" (404). Princess Napraxine's emphasis on cash becomes particularly prominent at moments when men turn their desiring (and aestheticising) eyes onto her. In one episode, Othmar pleads that without love life is worthless, poetically slipping into French: "Un seul être est mort et tout est dépeuplé!" (410). The princess responds sardonically, bringing Othmar's link with the world of consumption firmly back into the picture:

I can imagine that a man might fancy so for twenty-four hours; but even if the fancy endure, a rich man can enjoy his desolation while a poor man cannot. Part of the advantages of the rich man consists in his having the leisure and the luxury to muse upon his own unhappiness. I think you forget what a great happiness that is! (410)

While Othmar would like to deny that his fortune is meaningful to him, his happiness is at bottom, Princess Napraxine clearly implies, crucially dependent upon it. In this way, Princess Napraxine emphasises Othmar's dependence on the world of consumption at the very moment when he attempts to draw her away from that world by aestheticising her.

Princess Napraxine's resistance to male attempts to separate her from consumer culture is evident throughout the novel. In another episode, her suitor Geraldine attempts to locate her in an aesthetic landscape at La Jacquemerille by encouraging her to take the place, telling her, "You have the sea at your feet and the mountains at your back" (379). By situating the princess amongst nature, with all its poetic and transcendent resonance, Geraldine, like Othmar, attempts to extricate her from the world of consumer culture. However, Princess Napraxine deflates Geraldine's project by again emphasising her own involvement in the world of commodities. She tells him that the natural landscape at La Jacquemerille cannot suit her because "When once we belong to the world" it is impossible ever to "get rid of the world" (380). She continues:

If we try to drink spring-water, we put it somehow or other in a liqueur-glass. If we smell at a hedge-rose, somehow or other Piver has got in it before us, and given it the scent of a sachet .... No; when we are once of the world, worldly, we never get rid of the world again .... Who can lead a meditative life that dines twice a day, as we all practically do, and eats of twenty services? When we prattle about nature, and quote Matthew Arnold, we are as artificial as the ribboned shepherdesses of Trianon; and what we call our high art is only just another sort of jargon. (380)

Where Geraldine attempts to position the princess in a natural landscape against which her beauty would, presumably, be set off to advantage, Princess Napraxine brings herself back into the world of commodities stocked with perfumes and china figurines. Again, this suggests the princess's refusal to allow the men around her to deny the consumerism implicit in their gaze.

Notable in the passage cited above is the way in which Princess Napraxine links the world of commodities with the act of eating. Eating, of course, is consumption at its most fundamental, and it is precisely its more primitive materiality that renders it incompatible with Geraldine's romantic, aestheticised vision. The same point is made in another episode, this time involving the priest Melville. In a characteristically aesthetic manner, Princess Napraxine assigns aesthetic beauty to birds: "The only creature that is not offensive when it eats is a bird. Just one little dive in a rose, or under a vine-leaf, and it has breakfasted" (426). Melville attempts to extend the aesthetic beauty of birds to women: "When a very pretty woman eats a

strawberry, the bird is not very much her superior” (426). The princess immediately responds by emphasising the unattractive materiality of women eating: “were I a man I would never see the woman I admired taking her share of diseased livers, tortured fish, slaughtered songsters” (426). She here dismantles the romantic aestheticism attempted by Melville by stripping away eating to what it really is: consumption at its most basic and material. In contrast with the romantic function of Melville’s strawberry, the commodities that women consume are reduced to their bare materiality and described as “diseased livers” and “slaughtered songsters.”<sup>91</sup> In this way, Princess Napraxine insists on her own participation in consumer culture at its most unattractive, bodily level.

If Princess Napraxine refuses to allow the male aesthetic gaze to deny its involvement in consumer culture, her role as an extraordinarily accomplished female aesthete—superior, indeed, to every single other character in the novel—who simultaneously embraces consumerism is suggestive given Ouida’s own status as a popular woman writer. As mentioned above, there are clear parallels between Princess Napraxine and Ouida herself. We might thus interpret Princess Napraxine’s identification with consumer culture as a striking openness on Ouida’s part about her own involvement with it at this moment of her long-established and successful writing career. That is, at the same time that Princess Napraxine’s unabashed

participation in the world of consumer culture marks its inexorable infiltration into the art of fiction, it acknowledges Ouida's own link with popular fiction. Moreover, the fact that Princess Napraxine's involvement in the marketplace does not damage her skill as an artist sounds a note that is not usually associated with serious artists in the late nineteenth century. In other words, Ouida's treatment of Princess Napraxine's link with consumer culture simultaneously acknowledges her own popularity as a writer and refuses to allow it to undermine her artistic credibility.

It is worth recalling here Ouida's identification with Wilde, who, as Schaffer argues, headed a branch of aestheticism that was linked with both women and material culture. (Wilde could, indeed, figure as a point of identification for outsiders generally, given both his homosexuality and his Irishness.) Schaffer does not elaborate on what she means by "material culture," but it is not difficult to do so. Wilde expressed more overtly than most the impulse toward consumption that was contained within aestheticism generally. In 1884, he was making his living not as a producer of artworks *per se* (although his fame ensured good sales for his 1881 collection of poems), but as a professional consumer of aesthetic artefacts. He gave public lectures on art, in turn teaching the public how to consume aesthetically. As I have already mentioned, the topics of his lectures included not just paintings, but jewellery, fashion and interior decorating.<sup>92</sup> Wilde is, in short, associated



with a rather exuberant consumption aesthetic, whatever his claims to the contrary.<sup>93</sup> Ouida's decision to align herself with Wilde, then, further suggests her willingness to acknowledge her own involvement in material culture as an aesthete.

Nonetheless, Ouida does not swallow consumer culture's inexorable link with aestheticism with complete equanimity, an uncertainty that suggests that her identification with her heroine is more ambivalent than Schaffer allows. Ouida's discomfort with consumer culture is evident, to begin with, in the way in which Princess Napraxine's life is marked by an insuperable boredom. I have already discussed the theorisation of the insatiability of consumer desire in both Victorian economic theory and modern analyses of consumer culture. In *Princess Napraxine*, however, desire has gone a step beyond the insatiability described by Jevons and Menger and arrived at the point of chronic boredom. "[E]nnui," announces Princess Napraxine in the opening pages of the novel, is "ubiquitous" (374). The beginning of the novel is a miniature fable of the perpetual cycle of boredom that characterises consumer desire. The narrator describes how "For three months it had been the reigning desire of her [Princess Napraxine's] life to have La Jacquemerille for the winter" (373). As soon as her desire is granted, however, she regards the house that she "had fallen in love with" with "a sentiment very near akin to disgust" (373). This is Princess

Napraxine's world in a microcosm: a world in which satisfied desire almost immediately leads to discontent. As she says to a "sympathetic companion":

The morphine has been injected into our veins; we cannot resist its influence; there is a kind of excitement and somnolence, both at once, in the routine of our world, which none of us can resist. If we have any brains, perhaps we make resolutions to resist, but we do not keep them; the world we live in is idiotic, but it is irresistible. When we wake, we see the heap of invitation-cards on our table; we yawn, but we yield, and we fill up our book of engagements; the day is crowded, so is the year; and so life slips away hurried, tired, thinking itself amused. (685)

Princess Napraxine's boredom surprisingly foreshadows twentieth century accounts of consumer culture such as that by Baudrillard. Like Princess Napraxine, Baudrillard describes a numbing world in which the saturation of commodities has led to "[w]ork, leisure, nature, and culture ... becom[ing] mixed, massaged, climate controlled, and domesticated into the simple activity of perpetual shopping" (34) until "[e]verything is finally *digested* and reduced to the same homogenous fecal matter" (34-5). As in *Princess Napraxine*, people in Baudrillard's postmodern world restlessly move from one whim to another in an attempt to fulfil a desire that can never be satiated: "[t]he flight from one signifier to another is no more than the surface reality of a *desire*, which is insatiable because it is founded on a lack. And this desire, which can never be satisfied, signifies itself locally in a succession of objects and needs" (45). *Princess Napraxine's* representation of Baudrillard-esque boredom and insatiability (together with the way in which, as I noted

earlier, the commodification of people in the novel hints at Baudrillard's theorisation of society dominated by the hyperreal) suggests, indeed, that the model used by postmodern theorists to describe the advanced consumer culture of the twentieth century may not, in the end, be quite so modern after all.

These rhythms of consumption mark every aspect of Princess Napraxine's life. She regards society as "entirely like chloral: it gives you pleasant titillations at first and just the same *morne* depression afterwards, and yet you cannot do without it" (380). Her human relationships follow the same pattern of desire, satiation and boredom. She responds to Othmar's romantic overtures by telling him, "I confess that you please me; but you could not insure me against my own unfortunate capacity for very soon tiring of everybody, and—I have a conviction that in three months' time *I should be tired of you!*" (540). Even "Maternity," she says, shifts from being "first a malady" to "ennui" (592). This indifference to human connection invokes the self-centred and impersonal desire described by late-Victorian economic theorists. It is surely significant that Princess Napraxine is described rejecting "Stuart Mill's plea for the utility of virtue" with the "mental verdict of 'non-proven'" (396). That is, it is precisely the substantive concerns of political economists like Mill—who argued that "economic man's competitive struggle for accumulation and self-interest itself are merely part

of one stage—the industrial stage—of progress, by no means the end of progress” (Gagnier ‘Insatiability’ 132)—that later theorists excised from economic theory. Princess Napraxine is here firmly on the side of the neo-classicists.

Like her chronic boredom, Princess Napraxine’s indifference to human relations—we might say, the solipsism of modern consumer culture—is clearly intended to be viewed as a critique of the world of excess consumption in which she lives.<sup>94</sup> The narrator notes that “Now and then this refusal of hers to comprehend what she inspired ended in dire tragedy” (393), and during the course of the novel she causes the deaths of three men, including her husband. The human cost of the princess’s tendency to “cast” men “aside, with no more thought than she left to her maids a fan of an old fashion, a glove that had been worn once” (612), is especially poignantly illustrated by the death of Geraldine. The brother of Princess Napraxine’s good friend, the good-natured and down to earth Lady Brancepeth, Geraldine responds to the princess’s banishment of him from her by fleeing to the icy waters of Canada, where he drowns. His death induces his sister, who earlier begged Princess Napraxine to spare him, to write to her now former friend, telling her that, “The pain with which you filled him made him wander in an aimless unrest from place to place in an alien world with which he had no sympathy, and made him only too willing to die, that he might so throw the

fever of your memory” (713-4). Princess Napraxine’s solipsism, the product of her immersion in consumer culture, leads to a disastrous rejection of human connection.

Significantly, too, the princess’s entrapment in the superficial material world in which she lives means her own considerable talents are wasted. Together with her “infinite intelligence” (649), there is, the narrator says, “at the bottom of her soul, despite her languor, ennui, and pessimism, a certain heroic element” (685). This heroism surfaces in an episode in which she drives across Russia in the middle of winter to save the life of a writer who has been sentenced to death, his plight having aroused the “generosity and sympathy with courage which always lived beneath the artificiality and indifference of her habits and temper” (637). Even though she herself treats that particular act of heroism with “indifference” (636), she notes elsewhere, somewhat wistfully, that, “Sometimes ... I think I might have been something great if I had been born in the time for it” (685). She adds: “What possibility of any greatness is there for a woman who lives nowadays in what calls itself the great world? .... We are born to dress, to drive, to dine, to dance, to set the fashion in all kinds of things; and that is all” (685). In an economy in which she is judged entirely upon her external appearance, her other talents are wasted and she is destined to be known as little more than “a coquette, a *mondaine*, a mere *elegante* of the elegant world” (416).

The only alternative to the world of consumption of which Princess Napraxine is the novel's most accomplished practitioner is that offered by Yseulte. Yseulte is a stranger to Princess Napraxine's world and values non-materialistic qualities. When her cousin, Alain de Vannes, gives her a magnificent locket, she is "moved" not by "the gift of the medallion itself, splendid though it was," but by "the idea that any one had so much remembrance for her" (487). (In fact, she cares so little about the material value of the locket that she intends to sell it to buy the vicar a new soutane (493).) This treasuring of human connection also induces her to find "charm" in "peasants grubbing among pea-stalks and growing salad" because "they loved her a little" (453). Her values are shown to be starkly different from those that exist in the world inhabited by Princess Napraxine. She feels only pity for her young cousins, Blanchette and Toinon, whose addiction to "costly playthings" and fashionable toilets prevents them from appreciating "daisies and kingcups" (451) or "a magnificat sung at Notre Dame" (450). Yseulte's separation from the world of consumption is particularly marked by the strong emphasis on her innocent childishness, which contrasts with the premature age caused by "the household, of the *galérie*, of the routine, of the infinite *ennui*" (383). Princess Napraxine, who is "only twenty-three," feels "as if I had lived fifty years" (383), while her young cousins "would die

without ever having been young” (451). All of these characters are deliberately contrasted with Yseulte’s exaggerated childishness.

Yseulte may be characterised by her youthfulness, but she also belongs to an old aristocratic type that manifests itself in her “manner of the last century ... before the women of Marie Antoinette rode donkeys and milked cows” (662). It is a type, moreover, that is rapidly becoming extinct. The penniless orphan of an old aristocratic family that perished in the Franco-Prussian war, she dies at the end of the novel without any surviving children. As the Duc de Vannes says, “She is the true *ingénue* of the novelist and dramatist: she knows nothing beyond the four walls of the convent. It is a type fast disappearing, even with us, under the influence of American women and English romances” (446). The duke’s reference to fiction is here suggestive. He links Yseulte to an older fictional type—the “*ingénue* of the novelist and dramatist”—that is being superseded by modern English fiction (confusingly, Ouida often used the terms “romance” and “novel” interchangeably). Elsewhere, Yseulte is described as “just like a vignette out of ‘Paul et Virginie’” (561), the late eighteenth century novel by French author Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre.

Yseulte’s association with an older style of fiction can be illuminated by again turning to Schaffer, who, as I outlined in the Introduction, links Yseulte and Princess Napraxine with different reading audiences that are in

turn linked with two different versions of femininity. To repeat, Schaffer sees the character of Princess Napraxine as designed to satisfy an “‘elite’ readership that welcomed sophisticated amoral psychological characters exploring nonmarital alternatives” (139), while the character of Yseulte caters for “the popular audience that demanded Gothic thrillers resolved by domesticity” (139) and populated by innocent angels in the house. Yseulte, Schaffer argues, “enacts precisely the story of the household Angel—the loving woman who wastes away and dies, completing her apotheosis into an actual angel” (147) with her sacrificial death. As Schaffer points out, this narrative “had already become outmoded” (147) by the time that *Princess Napraxine* was published.

What is intriguing or ironic is that it is in, of all places, this older, popular fiction—aimed, according to Schaffer, at a popular audience—that Ouida finds an alternative to consumer culture. It stands in contrast to the modern, aesthetic fiction associated with Princess Napraxine, the fiction that Schaffer considers to be linked with an ‘advanced,’ “elite” audience and which seems to be associated with the emerging world of mass production. In a very real sense the older romantic fiction that Yseulte represents *does* belong to a world that predates the developing consumer culture of the 1880s. It is clear, however, that this older fiction is not really a viable alternative to Princess Napraxine’s brand of consumer-based aestheticism.



Schaffer considers Yseulte's death to be evidence of the novel's recognition that her brand of femininity is "unworkable" (148). We can also interpret Yseulte's death as evidence of the novel's recognition that the older kind of pre-mass culture fiction linked with her is no longer viable in a literary landscape moving inexorably towards mass culture. Yseulte's ineffectiveness beside Princess Napraxine is, indeed, emphasised long before her death, most obviously in her inability to attract Othmar. Typically, the princess exactly deduces Yseulte's inability to compete with her: "When I choose ... he [Othmar] will leave her and she will break her heart" (719). Yseulte instinctively recognises this as well, and her consciousness of her inferiority beside the princess so utterly intimidates her that in her presence she is "paralyzed" and made "awkward, foolish, and constrained," unable to give more than "a stupid sentence or so" (778). As Princess Napraxine says: "She is afraid of me, and she dislikes me; she tries to hide it all she can, but she does not know how" (719). Yseulte's inability to compete with the princess suggests that the older fiction associated with her has little hope of standing up against the modern, commercially adapted fiction of the late nineteenth century.

While *Princess Napraxine* acknowledges, and refuses to demonise, art's new relationship with commodity culture, its positive treatment of Yseulte registers a wistfulness for the loss of what came before. It recognises

her value and mourns her loss. Her inability to find succour in the modern world, a helplessness that is related to her embodiment of values that have been almost completely superseded, arouses an inexpressible sadness in the novel. She dies unable to tell Othmar: “Instead of all your jewels, instead of all this luxury, give me one fond word” (583). Nonetheless, when Melville notes that “content was not a quality which the tendencies of the waning nineteenth century were likely to foster,” he identifies a “restlessness” (388) that has permanently installed itself.

The profound ambivalence about consumer culture that marks *Princess Napraxine* is perhaps prophetic, given the way in which women writers were, by the end of the nineteenth century, damned for their degrading involvement with consumer culture. Despite this, *Princess Napraxine* can in many ways be described as the zenith of Ouida’s fiction. Shaped by the aestheticism that was a prominent part of the British literary scene in the 1880s, it is perhaps an unlikely source for an exposure of aestheticism’s involvement in the developing consumer culture of the late nineteenth century. It is also arguably Ouida’s most assured novel, a tale of a confident, powerful and feminine female artist who accepts and even exploits her involvement in the marketplace. Most of all, however, *Princess Napraxine* is a reminder of the other story that lies behind the rise of modernism, alerting us to the diverse and manifold responses to the changing

market conditions under which authors wrote in the second half of the nineteenth century.

### Afterword

Ouida's reputation, like those of many other women writers, suffered long-term damage from the masculinist backlash that took place at the end of the nineteenth century as high art and popular art split decisively away from each other. Women writers' fate during this period has been analysed in detail by Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin, who in their study of, amongst other things, Macmillan's publishing records and reviews published in the *Athenaeum*, argue that women writers were 'edged out' of the high culture novel. Aspects of Tuchman's and Fortin's work have subsequently been criticised; however, one cannot deny either the excision of women writers from the literary canon from the death of George Eliot until the rise of Virginia Woolf—the latter of whom was, Sally Ledger points out, until recently a “token female presence” in the “tradition of Anglo-American high modernism” (180)—or the exceptionally fierce backlash against women writers that took place during the *fin de siècle*.<sup>95</sup> It is no coincidence that the modernism that grew out of late-Victorian attempts to establish the high culture novel came to be, as Andreas Huyssen details in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, associated with “a male mystique” that “goes hand in hand” with “the gendering of an inferior mass culture as feminine” (50).

The backlash against women writers at the end of the nineteenth century was motivated by a sense that women were taking over the literary marketplace, and the anxieties raised by this perception took a number of forms. Scholars such as Showalter and Ledger, for example, have described how late nineteenth century male writers such as Rider Haggard, Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling endeavoured to colonise the romance, hitherto primarily associated with women. As Showalter puts it in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, “[t]he revival of ‘romance’ ... was a men’s literary revolution intended to reclaim the kingdom of the English novel for male writers, male readers, and men’s stories” (78-9). At the same time, as Ledger, together with others such as Lyn Pykett and Jane Eldridge Miller have also described, writers including George Moore and George Gissing “had as their aim the creation of a ‘new’ realism ... which focused upon the harsh economic and sexual realities of life in the late nineteenth century” and “carefully announced itself as ‘serious’ literature rather than entertainment, a type of fiction which would be beyond the ken of women writers” (Ledger 179). George Moore’s pamphlet *Literature at Nurse*, an attack on the censorship imposed by the circulating libraries in which it is claimed that “literature is now rocked to an ignoble rest in the motherly arms of the librarian” instead of “being allowed to fight, with and amid, the thoughts and aspiration of men” (18), is a famous

example of the male realist attempt to define his literature against women's realism.

Somewhat ironically, the male realists' attempt to define themselves against popular women's domestic fiction "entirely backfired," as Ledger puts it, when the New Woman writers appropriated the male realists' dogma in order to justify a new, feminine realism. In the words of Ann Ardis: "[i]f the project of the 'new' novelists was to effect a more accurate representation of women than had been possible in either 'classic' English realism or French naturalism, then who—it was argued—could speak with more authority than the New Woman herself on subjects that the 'old' realism neglected to detail?" (43). Faced with the New Woman writers' colonisation of their own aesthetic, masculinist writers and critics proceeded to denounce the aesthetic quality of both New Woman fiction and women's fiction generally. Ardis sees 1895 as the year in which criticism of New Woman fiction switched to aesthetic grounds, citing William Courtney's 1904 *The Feminine Note in Fiction*, in which "the 'feminine note' in fiction is undoubtedly an aesthetically impoverished one" (55), as a consummate expression of the kind of misogynistic criticism that followed.

Ouida's vigorous attempts to distinguish herself from the New Woman writers in essays such as 'The New Woman' and 'Female Suffrage' perhaps anticipated the way in which they would ultimately be dismissed on

aesthetic grounds. Certainly, the often clumsy writing of a New Woman writer like Sarah Grand, who felt that withholding publication until she had “mastered syntax” was analogous to “waiting to don a becoming costume in which to render help, when the cry was: ‘All hands to the pump, or we perish’” (cited in Bonnell ‘Critical Establishment’ 137), makes it clear that feminism, not art, was the primary consideration of at least some of these writers. Ouida’s efforts to establish herself as a serious artist were, however, ultimately futile. Despite the surge of praise of Ouida’s writing that was delivered by figures such as Max Beerbohm, Vernon Lee and G. S. Street around the turn of the century, the sorry fate that her fiction faced for most of the twentieth century is testimony to the effectiveness of this vehement masculine reaction against women writers.<sup>96</sup>

As we have seen, Ouida’s novels were, until quite recently, classed as trivial popular fiction; as something not serious enough to be the subject of literary analysis. To view her simply as a popular writer who prostituted herself to the marketplace is, however, to obliterate the complexity of her engagement with her cultural situation as a woman writer and, moreover, to participate in the wider erasure of the forms that women writers’ authorship took in the second half of the nineteenth century. In many ways—her public confidence in her artistic and professional aims, for example—Ouida clearly differs from most of the mid-century women novelists. Her rebellion against

earlier models of women's authorship means that she has a good deal in common with the sensation novelists. However, her self-conscious artistic aims also clearly distinguish her from the sensation novelists, just as they distinguish her from the New Woman novelists whose feminist aims arguably outranked their artistic ones. Like all women writers during this period, however, Ouida faced a literary culture that was structured by a complexly gendered network of assumptions and discourses. Observing her responses to the literary situation that determined her reception as a woman writer illuminates some of the ways in which crucial changes in literary culture in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly the splitting of high and popular art from each other, impacted upon women writers generally.

In this thesis, I have examined Ouida's often innovative responses to the gendered mores shaping the literary culture in which she wrote. I attended first to her response to the domestic novel, and its role in shaping women's authorship; then to her responses to the incipient splitting of high and popular art and its association with the ideology of occupational professionalism; to the related shift towards the new, more serious, fiction in the late-century; and, finally, to the advent of British aestheticism. I certainly do not, of course, claim to have exhausted the possible ways in which Ouida's relationship to female authorship in the nineteenth century could be



approached: the varied and, indeed, often experimental nature of her novels undoubtedly has the potential to open up further paths of examination (her identification with the feminine romantic tradition of George Sand suggests itself, for example). Nonetheless, by tracing some of the ways in which changes surrounding the novel in the second half of the nineteenth century impacted on Ouida's fiction, I have indicated how her "highfalutin blather about her 'art'" (306), as Malcolm Elwin put it, can, if taken seriously, uncover what remain forgotten aspects of women's literary culture, and, consequently, assist us in piecing together a more representative picture of literary culture generally in the second half of the nineteenth century.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The principal source for the biographical information in this section, unless indicated otherwise, is Eileen Bigland's *Ouida: The Passionate Victorian*.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence is a fascinating writer whose fiction, even more than Ouida's, is begging for critical attention. No significant modern criticism has been devoted to him: following the publication of Gordon H. Fleming's 1952 essay *George Alfred Lawrence and the Victorian Sensation Novel*, only R. C. Terry's 1983 *Victorian Popular Fiction, 1860-80* and Dee Garrison's 1976 'Immoral Fiction in the Late Victorian Library' (86-7) include discussion of Lawrence of beyond a few sentences, and neither of these is substantial. Lawrence's neglect continues despite the burgeoning of critical interest in Victorian masculinities in studies that include (amongst numerous others) Norman Vance's *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (1985), James Eli Adams's *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (1995), Herbert Sussman's *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (1995), the volume *Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture* (2000), edited by Andrew Bradstock, Sean Gill, Anne Hogan and Sue Morgan; and Andrew Dowling's *Manliness and the Male Novelist in Victorian Literature* (2001). The most recent monograph on this subject is Dan Bivona's and Roger B. Henkle's *The Imagination of Class: Masculinity and the Urban Poor* (2006).

<sup>3</sup> The biographies are: Elizabeth Lee's *Ouida: A Memoir* (1914); Yvonne ffrench's *Ouida: A Study in Ostentation* (1938); Eileen Bigland's *Ouida: The Passionate Victorian* (1950); and Monica Stirling's *The Fine and the Wicked: The Life and Times of Ouida* (1958). The later biographies mostly rework the material first published in Lee, although Bigland is the

most useful for scholarly purposes. Stirling's desire to downplay the scandalous aspects of Ouida's life results in the excision of entire sections of it (her dealings with her publishers, for example). See also William Allen's article 'Ouida' in *The British Eccentric* (1975), Roy B. Stokes's entry on Ouida in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (1983) and Helen Killoran's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

<sup>4</sup> For other bibliographies of criticism on Ouida, see John Sutherland's introduction to *Under Two Flags* and the article 'Ouida: 1839-1908' in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the *Cambridge History of English and American Literature* (1921), 28; Bonamy Dobrée (1932), 194; and Olivia Manning's introduction to the Doughty Library edition of *Under Two Flags* (1967).

<sup>6</sup> Other scholars from the first half of the nineteenth-century who briefly address Ouida include Amy Cruse in *The Victorians and Their Books* (1935), 327-9, who describes Ouida's popularity amongst Victorian readers, as well as attacks on her immorality; Ernest A. Baker in *The History of the English Novel* (1937), 214-5, who regards her fiction as florid and melodramatic; and Merle Mowbray Bevington in *The Saturday Review, 1855-68: Representative Educated Opinion in Victorian England* (1941), 196-7, who summarises critical reaction to her in the *Saturday Review*.

<sup>7</sup> See also Weedon's earlier essay 'From Three-Deckers to Film Rights: A Turn in British Publishing Strategies, 1870-1930' (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Other critics briefly to address Ouida in the second half of the twentieth century include Lionel Stevenson, who in *The English Novel: A Panorama* (1960), 356-7, outlines her fanciful fiction and, together with other sensation novelists, her "paradoxical ... influence in preparing the way for greater realism in fiction" (357); Siegfried Mews, 'Sensationalism and

Sentimentality: Minor Victorian Prose Writers in Germany,' who offers some discussion of Ouida's publishing history in Germany and outlines the plot of *Under Two Flags* (1969); Kenneth Inniss, who gives a brief and dismissive discussion of the Zu-Zu from *Under Two Flags* in 'The Ruined Maid and Her Prospect: Some Victorian Attitudes in Life and Art' (1972), 121-2; Dee Garrison, who includes Ouida in a 1976 survey of "immoral" fiction, and outlines the plot of *Under Two Flags*, pp86-8; Jenni Calder, who briefly mentions Ouida in her 1976 *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (197); Mary Anne Lindborg, who in 'Dreiser's Sentimental Heroine, Aileen Butler' (1977) traces some similarities between Viva in *Tricotrín* and Theodore Dreiser's character Aileen Butler, 593-4; Bo Jeffares, who briefly discusses artist characters in *Two Little Wooden Shoes* in *The Artist in Nineteenth Century English Fiction*, 31-2, 115, 149; Roy MacLeod, who in 'The "Bankruptcy of Science" Debate: The Creed of Science and its Critics, 1885-1900' (1982) describes Ouida's attack on Sir Lyon Playfair's 1886 British Association address, 5-6; John R. Reed, who gives a short discussion of *The Massarenes* in his survey of financial speculation in Victorian fiction, 'A Friend to Mammon: Speculation in Victorian Literature' (1984), 200-1; Barbara Arnett Melchiori, who in *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (1985) identifies "[t]he Romantic aspect of Nihilism" (152) and Ouida's engagement with the anti-vivisection debate in *Princess Napraxine*, 152-6; David Rubinstein, who briefly discusses Ouida in the context of the naming of the New Woman in *Before the Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s*' (1986), 15-6; Ann Ardis, who in *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990), briefly discusses Ouida in the context of the naming of the New Woman 10-12, 19; Dolores Mitchell, who in 'The "New Woman" as Prometheus: Women Artists Depict Women Smoking' (1991), 4, is interested in the character of Cigarette from *Under Two Flags* as a woman who is represented smoking; Deborah Wynne, who in *The Sensation*

*Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (1991), 74-6, discusses the serialisation of *Granville de Vigne* in the *New Monthly Magazine*; Dorothy Mermin, who gives a short discussion of Ouida in *Godiva's Ride* (1993), in which it is concluded that Ouida "didn't just match in her stories the experiences of her life ... she tried to inhabit the world of her own imagination, and her success in doing so destroyed her" (84); Michael Wheeler, who lists Ouida in his bibliography of authors at the end of *English Fiction of the Victorian Period* (1994); Charles A. Johanningsmeier, who in *Fiction and the American Literary Marketplace: The Role of Newspaper Syndicates in America, 1860-1900* (1997) has some discussion of Ouida's agitation against syndicates, 66, 108, 214, 222, and her reputation as an immoral writer, 134, 168; Carole G. Silver, who argues in 'Tissot's Victorian Narratives: Allusion and Invention' (1999) that Tissot's painting *La Mystérieuse* is "an homage through allusion to Ouida and her novel *Moths*" (123); Graham Law, who describes Ouida's attack on literary middlemen in *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (2000), 169. Entries on Ouida in encyclopaedic surveys include Greenlees's entry in *The Novel to 1900* (1980), where Ouida's fiction is compared with that of Ronald Firbank and it is claimed that her novels of Italian peasant life "foreshadow the realistic works of Verga and D'Annunzio" (234); the somewhat caustic entry in *The Cambridge Guide to English Literature* (1983), in which Ouida is described as an inferior writer catering to the market for popular fiction, although it is conceded that she did have "a strong narrative gift" (662); John Sutherland's entry on Ouida in *The Stanford Companion to Victorian Fiction* (1989), which describes her writing as derivative and melodramatic; Rosemary Jann's somewhat sketchy entries in the *Dictionary of British Women Writers* (1989) and *An Encyclopaedia of British Women Writers* (1998) that emphasise the fantasy element of her fiction; the entry on Ouida in *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (1990), 819-20; the entry on Ouida in Joanne

Shattock's *The Oxford Guide to British Women Writers* (1993); the entry 'Ouida' in *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (1995); the entry 'Ouida' in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (2000). Two more substantial, but non-scholarly discussions can be found in Rachel Anderson's survey of romantic fiction, *The Purple Heart Throbs: The Sub-Literature of Love* (1974), and Mary Cadogan's *And Then Their Hearts Stood Still: An Exuberant Look at Romantic Fiction Past and Present* (1994). Anderson's rather condescending chapter on Ouida is really just a rewriting of older assessments of Ouida (indeed, Anderson's statement that "her novels ramble and roar along, piling one situation on to another to produce a colourful, rapid and cinematic effect" (63) could have come straight out of contemporary reviews of Ouida's fiction in the *Athenaeum*, which Anderson evidently read). Cadogan offers a similar analysis, although she does argue that Cigarette in *Under Two Flags* introduced into romantic fiction "the archetypal fictional tomboy, the girl whose tough exterior hides a heart of gold; who claims equality of opportunity—and risk—with men, but also offers them her love and loyalty, and would have been the type to settle down in the story's final paragraphs as a conventional wife and fecund mother" (65). Cadogan also argues that Ouida "had a strong influence" (65) on "stories for girls in their early teens" (65-6).

<sup>9</sup> For example, the only nineteenth-century novelists examined by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) are Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot; Julia Swindells's *Victorian Writing and Working Women: The Other Side of Silence* (1985) looks at Eliot, Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë; the nineteenth-century novelists whom Margaret Homans looks at in *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing* (1986) are Emily Brontë, Charlotte

Brontë, Mary Shelley, Eliot and Gaskell; Elsie B. Michie's *Outside the Pale: Cultural Exclusion, Gender Difference and the Victorian Woman Writer* (1993) has chapters on Mary Shelley, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Gaskell and Eliot; the novelists examined in Ruth Y. Jenkins's *Reclaiming Myths of Power: Women Writers and the Victorian Spiritual Crisis* (1995) are Charlotte Brontë, Gaskell and Eliot.

<sup>10</sup> On Oliphant and authorship, see Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, especially 20, 46-8, 83, 85, 105-6; Valerie Sanders's *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century England* (1989), especially 86-91; Mary Jean Corbett's *Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies* (1992), especially 104-6; Dorothy Mermin's *Godiva's Ride: Women of Letters in England, 1830-1880* (1993), especially 86-92; chapter five of Linda Peterson's *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (1999) and her essay 'Women Writers and Self-Writing' (2001); Judith Johnston's and Hilary Fraser's 'The Professionalization of Women's Writing: Extending the Canon' (2001), especially 233; Trev Lynn Broughton's 'Studying the Study: Gender and the Scene of Authorship in the Writings of Leslie Stephen, Margaret Oliphant and Anne Thackeray Ritchie' (2003). On Martineau, see Sanders *Private Lives*, especially 130-4; Corbett, especially 83-6 and 89-97; Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography*, especially 54-79, and 'Women Writers and Self-Writing,' especially 216-7; Mermin, especially 100-6. On Tonna, see Sanders, *Private Lives*, especially 79-82; Corbett, especially 72-9; Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography*, especially 43-54, and 'Women Writers and Self-Writing,' especially 215-6; Mermin, especially 109; Mary Lenard's 'Deathbeds and Didacticism: Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna and Victorian Social

Reform' (2003); chapter seven of Christine L. Krueger's *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (1992).

<sup>11</sup> Aside from the texts mentioned in footnote 15, below, critical work attending to female authorship in the context of the *fin de siècle* writers includes chapter four of Penny Boumelha's *Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (1982) and her essay 'The Woman of Genius and the Woman of Grub Street: Figures of the Female Writer in British *Fin-de-Siècle* Fiction' (1997); Gerd Bjørhovde's *Rebellious Structures: Women Writers and the Crisis of the Novel 1880-1900* (1987); Gaye Tuchman's and Nina Fortin's *Edging Women Out: Victorian Novelists, Publishers, and Social Change* (1989); Deborah Epstein Nord's "'Neither Pairs nor Odd": Female Community in Late Nineteenth-Century London' (1990); N. N. Feltes's *Literary Capital and the Late Victorian Novel* (1993), especially 118-28; Sally Ledger's *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (1997), especially 27-8 and chapter seven; Lyn Pykett's 'Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman: Representations of the Female Artist in the New Woman Fiction of the 1890s' (1999); Talia Schaffer's 'A Novelist of Character: Becoming Lucas Malet' (2004); and chapters three and six of Ann Heilmann's *New Woman Strategies: Sarah Grand, Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird* (2004).

<sup>12</sup> On women's anxiety about authorship, see for example Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, 22; Swindells 109-11; Shirley Foster, *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (1985), 12-3; Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (1987), 62-3; Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women*, 75-6, 84 and "'Fathers' Daughters": Three Victorian Anti-Feminist Women Autobiographers' (1996), 159; Clarke, chapter one; Janet L. Larson's "'Who is Speaking?": Charlotte Brontë's Voices of Prophecy'; Hilary Schor, *Scheherezade in the Marketplace: Elizabeth Gaskell and the*



*Victorian Novel* (1992), 23; Patricia E. Johnson's 'Charlotte Brontë and Desire (to Write): Pleasure, Power, and Prohibition' (1993); Michie, 82-4; Krueger, 159; Corbett 56-9; Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts: The Male Muses of Emily and Charlotte Brontë* (1990), especially 9-10, Mermin, xiv, xvi-ii. See Clair Pettit, *Patent Inventions—Intellectual Property and the Victorian Novel* (2004), chapter five, and Mermin xv-xvi for alternative viewpoints that hold women's marginalisation as something that potentially gives them less anxiety than male writers.

<sup>13</sup> For example, see Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, 21-2; Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere: A Study of the Brontë Sisters as Early-Victorian Female Novelists* (1966), 40-1; Nina Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts* (1985), 178-81; Swindells, especially 63; Foster, especially 12-3; Homans, especially 170-88; chapter four of Sanders's *Private Lives* and her essay 'Father's Daughter'; chapter five of Thompson; Corbett, especially chapters two and three; Deidre D'Alberty's *Disassembling Fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text* (1997), especially chapter one; June Sturrock's 'Literary Women of the 1850s and Charlotte Mary Yonge's *Dynevor Terrace*' (1999); Peterson, *Traditions*, 49-51, and "'No Finger Posts—No Guides": Victorian Women Writers and the Paths to Fame' (1999), 39; Michie, especially 64-7. On Charlotte Brontë's attempt to protect her own reputation by explaining her sister Emily's apparent gender transgressions, see especially Thompson, 43-4, 51-7 and Joanne Wilkes, 'Remaking the Canon' (2001), 41-6.

<sup>14</sup> According to Carolyn Christensen Nelson in *British Women Fiction Writers of the 1890s* (1996), the women writers of the 1890s were the first both to write *Kunstlerroman* featuring women artists and to write openly about the problems they faced. For further discussion of this representation of and agitation against the gendered restrictions placed on

them, see Pykett, *The Improper Feminine* (1992), especially 180-90, and 'Portraits of the Artist as a Young Woman' (1999); Margaret Diane Stetz's 'New Grub Street and the Woman Writers of the 1890s' (1994), especially 19-41; Nelson, 18, 33; Teresa Mangum's *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (1998), chapter five; Peterson, *Traditions*, especially 174-87; Annette Federico's *Idol of Suburbia: Marie Corelli and Late-Victorian Literary Culture* (2000), especially 20-1 and chapter three; Ann Heilmann's *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000), especially chapter five; SueAnn Schatz in 'The Domestic Professional Writer, the Working Poor, and Middle-Class Values in *The Years that the Locust Hath Eaten* and *The Story of a Modern Woman*' (2003) on Ella Hepworth Dixon; Molly Youngkin's "'Independent in Thought and Expression, Kindly and Tolerant in Tone": Henrietta Stannard, *Golden Gates*, and Gender Controversies in *Fin-de-Siècle* Periodicals' (2005). On the notion of a feminine aesthetic, see Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990), especially 64-8; Ann Ardis's *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990), especially 126-33; Pykett's *The Improper Feminine*, especially 195-6; chapter one of Jane Eldridge Miller's *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (1994); Marilyn Bonnell's 'Sarah Grand and the Critical Establishment: Art for [Wo]man's Sake' (1995); Rita S. Kranidis's *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (1995); Mangum, especially chapter five; Federico, especially chapter three; Nicole M. Fluhr's 'Figuring the New Woman: Writers and Mothers in George Egerton's Early Stories' (2001); chapters three and six of Heilmann, *New Woman Strategies*; Agnieszka Żabicka's 'Female Gothic Motifs in Mona Caird's *The Wing of Azrael*' (2005); Kristen Guest, 'Rewriting Faust: Marie Corelli's Female Tragedy' (2005).

<sup>15</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon is the best-known of the woman sensation novelists. Anne Thackeray Ritchie (1837-1919), the daughter of William Makepeace Thackeray, published her first novel, *The Story of Elizabeth*, in 1863. Rhoda Broughton (1840-1920) wrote scandalous popular novels featuring outspoken heroines; her first novel was published in 1867. Rosa Nouchette Carey (1840-1909), published her first novel in 1868; she was an immensely popular writer who wrote “‘wholesome’ optimistic domestic romances” (‘Carey, Rosa Nouchette’ 178); her first novel, *Nellie’s Memories*, was published in 1868. Florence Marryat (1839-1919) was a sensation novelist whose first novel, *Love’s Conflict*, was published in 1869. Emma Marshall (1830-99) wrote “mildly didactic Christian fiction” (‘Marshall, Emma’ 719); she began writing in 1861 and published over 200 works. Annie Thomas (1838-1913) was a popular novelist who published over 60 novels. Christabel Rose Coleridge published numerous novels and short stories from 1869. Isabella Harwood (1838-c1888) was a popular novelist who published her first novel in 1864. Of these authors, Braddon has received by far the most critical attention, although Ritchie and Broughton have been the subject of some attention in recent years. A research guide to Carey, *Rosa Nouchette Carey* (1989), has been published by Jane Crisp, as well as a book length study, Elaine Hartnell’s *Gender, Religion and Domesticity in the Novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey* (2000). Two essays, Octavia Davis’s ‘Morbid Mothers: Gothic Heredity in Florence Marryat’s *The Blood of the Vampire* (2007) and Robert T. Eldridge’s ‘The Other Vampire Novel of 1897: *The Blood of the Vampire* by Florence Marryat’ (1998), have been published on Marryat, and H. L. Malchow’s *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1996) includes discussion of *The Blood of the Vampire*. Marryat’s novel *Love’s Conflict* (1865) is also reprinted in the collection *Varieties of Women’s Sensation Fiction: 1855-1890*

(2004), edited by Andrew Maunder. Marshall, Thomas, Coleridge and Harwood have received no significant critical attention.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Katherine Montwieler's 'Marketing Sensation: *Lady Audley's Secret* and Consumer Culture' (2000); Debora Wynne's discussion of *Eleanor's Victory* in chapter six of *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (2001); Catherine J. Golden's 'Censoring Her Sensationalism: Mary Elizabeth Braddon and *The Doctor's Wife*' (2006), 35; Albert C. Sears's 'Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the 'Combination Novel': The Subversion of Sensational Expectation in *Vixen*' (2006). In "'Our Author': Braddon in the Provincial Weeklies' (2000), Jennifer Carnell and Graham Law concede that "[i]n particular, female authors ... were subject to processes of production and distribution that were controlled by" (128) men, but argue that Braddon and other women writers should not be seen as "merely passive victims of economic and ideological circumstance" because they "accepted with great enterprise the challenge of writing see as the rapid accumulation of literary capital" and "used "sensation and romance covertly to ... question the restricted roles then assigned to women in both private and public spheres" (128). Three scholars who have looked more specifically at Braddon in the context of *women's* authorship are Solveig C. Robinson in 'Editing *Belgravia*: M. E. Braddon's Defense of "Light Literature"' (1995), Wynne on Ellen Wood in *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (2001), 66; and Karen M. Odden in "'Reading Coolly" in *John Marchmont's Legacy*: Reconsidering M. E. Braddon's Legacy' (2004).

<sup>17</sup> On the way in which William Thackeray simultaneously fostered and hampered Ritchie's writing career, see Katherine Hill-Miller, "'The Skies and Trees of the Past': Anne Thackeray Ritchie and William Makepeace Thackeray' (1989). On Ritchie's relationship with her publishers, see Helen Debenham's 'The *Cornhill Magazine* and the Literary

Formation of Anne Thackeray Ritchie' (2000) and 61-3 of Carol Hanbery MacKay's *Creative Negativity: Four Victorian Exemplars of the Female Quest* (2001). According to MacKay, Ritchie employs a strategy of "prankishness" that enables her to "work within publishers' impositions and yet deal with serious human concerns" (62). MacKay also discusses Ritchie's creative relationship with her father in 'Biography as Reflected Autobiography: The Self-Creation of Anne Thackeray Ritchie' (1990). See also Janice H. Harris's 'Not Suffering and Not Still: Women Writers at the *Cornhill Magazine*, 1860-1900' (1986) and Trev Lynn Broughton's essay for some further discussion of Ritchie.

<sup>18</sup> See Anthea Trodd's "'The Mothers of Our Mothers': Ghostly Strategies in Women's Writing' (1996), chapter three of MacKay's *Creative Negativity*, and MacKay's 'The Thackeray Connection,' 80-3.

<sup>19</sup> MacKay argues in *Creative Negativity* that Ritchie employs "a method of writing which strikes a deliberately and deceptively non-threatening pose" even as it disguises the fact that her "tales bristle with disturbing images" (14). Elaine Hartnell argues in *Gender, Religion and Domesticity in the Novels of Rosa Nouchette Carey* (2000) that Carey was "obliged, in her writing, to uphold the (inherently patriarchal) dominant. However, by indirect methods the dominant could be subverted" (10). H. L. Malchow claims that "it is clear" that Florence Marryat "in some sense internalized the male opposition from which she herself suffered professionally and projected it onto" (170) the vampire protagonist of her novel *The Blood of the Vampire*.

<sup>20</sup> Anne Marsh (also Anne Marsh-Caldwell), 1791-1875, published mostly domestic fiction; her best known novel was *Emilia Wyndham*. Dinah Mulock Craik (1826-1887) wrote domestic, often didactic, novels, as well as essays, reviews and children's stories, amongst other things. Her most successful novel, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1856), remained

in print until the second half of the twentieth century. Charlotte Yonge (1823-1901) was a highly successful author of conservative domestic fiction with a Tractarian flavour who was “repeatedly compared with Jane Austen, with Trollope, with Balzac, even with Zola” (Hayter 2); amongst her best-known books are *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), *Heartsease* (1854), *The Daisy Chain* (1856), and *The Clever Woman of the Family* (1865). There has been little critical interest in Marsh and her books are now difficult to find; see the *Dictionary of British Women Writers* for biographical information. Mulock Craik has had some critical attention, including Sally Mitchell’s study of her life and works, *Dinah Mulock Craik*. Yonge is better known and several biographies and a good deal of recent criticism has been published about her.

<sup>21</sup> Saussure argues that concepts in language are defined “not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not” (117).

<sup>22</sup> See Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 114.

<sup>23</sup> Middle-class gender ideology has received ample critical attention. Some useful introductory texts include Sally Mitchell’s *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class and Women’s Reading 1835-1880*, which focuses on femininity and purity (see in particular Chapter 2); *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, edited by Martha Vicinus; Elizabeth Langland’s *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (see especially Chapter 3); and Merryn Williams’s *Women in the English Novel, 1800-1900*.

<sup>24</sup> It goes without saying that the idea of separate spheres was an ideological fiction. In *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel*, for example, Jeff Nunokawa traces the way in which market forces pierced domestic life (women’s “status as

unportable property” (11) is only one example of this). Likewise, Langland’s *Nobody’s Angels* discusses the ways in which the duties of the middle-class housewife actually closely resembled the duties of male business managers.

<sup>25</sup> On authorship as feminine duty, see chapter one of D’Albertis’s *Dissembling Fictions* and Rosemarie Bodenheimer’s essay ‘Ambition and its Audiences: George Eliot’s Performing Figures.’

<sup>26</sup> Another notable example of this desire to ensure that feminine duties outrank authorship in their importance is Yonge’s father’s insistence that she donate all her earnings to charity (see Showalter 56-7). Linda Peterson’s *Traditions of Victorian Women’s Autobiography*, 49-51, offers more information about Tonna’s downplaying of her professional life. See also Mary Jean Corbett’s *Representing Femininity*, chapter two, for more general discussion of women writers’ downplaying of their professional lives.

It should be said that not everyone has seen Oliphant’s autobiography as an attempt to emphasise her femininity at the expense of her professional life. In her essay ‘The Domestic Drone: Margaret Oliphant and a Political History of the Novel,’ Deidre D’Albertis contests the traditional reading of the *Autobiography* as “a maternal document,” interpreting it instead as “a record of economic self-fashioning” (813) in which the book’s “internal logic” is shaped not by domestic life, but by “literary production” (815). D’Albertis argues that for Oliphant work “existed in a pragmatic, contingent realm, ‘in total indifference to all theory’ about the proper role of women as homemakers or laborers” (809). Peterson also argues in *Traditions of Victorian Women’s Autobiography* that Oliphant believes “[t]he artist-classes are exempt from the usual Victorian dichotomies of masculine and feminine, professional and domestic” (155).

<sup>27</sup> In *Bearing the Word*, Margaret Homans discusses women writers' passivity from another angle, exploring the notion that women's relationship to language is properly one in which they function as a "passive transmitter of others' words" (177). See especially chapter seven, which explores the ways in which Gaskell and Eliot constructed models of female authorship that were consistent with this notion.

<sup>28</sup> A different view from that of Corbett is taken by Christine L. Krueger, who argues that the "prophetic role" had to be justified by women writers who wished to claim it; she argues that Tonna, for example, "had to underscore every claim she made for her 'extraordinary call' with assurances that it was indeed an exception, that she was not challenging the traditional role of women in the patriarchy" (125). In a different vein, women writers' claim to a religious calling may also suggest the divine call of the Romantic poet, but it is difficult to believe that writers like Tonna would have been interested in aligning themselves with Romanticism. Indeed, Peterson points out that Tonna had "a lifelong Evangelical bias against fiction and the Romantic imagination, which she believed were 'inimical to rational pursuits, and opposed to spiritual-mindedness'" (*Traditions* 44). That aside, the highly gendered nature of Romantic aesthetics, in which a "masculine self dominates and internalizes otherness" that is "frequently identified as feminine" (Homans *Poetic Identity* 12) was problematic for women writers. See Homans, *Women and Poetic Identity* for detailed discussion of this.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter Three for more information about *Friendship* and its reception in Italy.

<sup>30</sup> The commencement of Ouida's writing career aligns almost exactly with the advent of sensation fiction. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, generally recognised as the first of the sensation novels, was serialised in *All the Year Round* from 1859-60 and published in three volumes in 1860. Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*, the first of the female sensation novels,



was serialised in the *New Monthly Magazine* from 1860-1 and published in three volumes in 1861, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's wildly popular *Lady Audley's Secret* was serialised from 1861-2 and published in three volumes in 1862. Ouida's own writing career began in 1859 when her first short stories were published in *Bentley's Miscellany*, and her first novel, *Held in Bondage*, was serialised in the *New Monthly Magazine* from 1861-3.

<sup>31</sup> As I indicated in the Introduction, Ouida's fiction was certainly influenced by the sensation novelists. Deborah Wynne points out that *Held in Bondage* ran alongside *East Lynne* for nine months of its serialisation in the *New Monthly Magazine* and Ouida "must have been following *East Lynne*'s progress because she borrows the names of some of Wood's aristocratic characters" (75). (Sandra Hannaford claims that "Ouida was inspired to write by the success of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*" (307), but since she published her first stories a year before Wood's novel began to be serialised it is difficult to credit this.) John Sutherland also argues that the plot of Ouida's 1867 novel *Under Two Flags* is directly influenced by *East Lynne* (xviii).

<sup>32</sup> A different perspective from that outlined here is given by Richard Nemesvari, who argues in "'Judged by a Purely Literary Standard': Sensation Fiction, Horizons of Expectation, and the Generic Construction of Victorian Realism" that the "assumption" that "realism was an established genre against which sensationalism came into conflict" is "problematic." Nemesvari claims instead that "the sensation fiction controversy served not to oppose a new genre to a preexisting one, but rather that the formulation of 'the sensational' was an essential, constitutive strategy which reified 'the realistic' in ways which had been unachievable before" (17).

<sup>33</sup> See Martin Meisel's essay 'Speaking Pictures: The Drama' in *Realizations* for a history and discussion of tableaux and painted backdrops on the Victorian stage.

<sup>34</sup> See Lynn M. Voskuil, 'Acting Naturally: Brontë, Lewes, and the Problem of Gender Performance' for a discussion of Brontë's and Lewes's perspectives on naturalness and gender in acting.

<sup>35</sup> On the concept of "in-betweenness," see Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*.

<sup>36</sup> One is also reminded here of Luce Irigaray's theory of the strategy of mimicry, in which women "assume the feminine role deliberately" so as to make "'visible,' by an effect of playful repetition" (76), the unnaturalness or constructedness of this role.

<sup>37</sup> See in particular Clifford Siskin's *The Work of Writing*, the most explicit account of the connection between professionalism and Romanticism. Siskin argues that the Romantics' attempts to carve themselves a literary identity were simultaneously crucial to the construction of modern professional identity. Other Romantic scholars who discuss the connection between professionalism and Romantic artistic identity include Catherine Ross ('How the Public Successes of a Poetic Scientist—Humphry Davy (1778-1829)—Changed English Literature') and Brian Goldberg (see, for example, "'Ministry More Palpable': William Wordsworth and the Making of Romantic Professionalism').

<sup>38</sup> See William Beatty Warner, 'Staging Readers Reading' for a pictorial history of the eighteenth century novel's association with sex.

<sup>39</sup> Sociologists have done a great deal of work on the sociology of professionalism. Some of the more important twentieth century theorists of the sociology of professionalism as it developed in the nineteenth century include Everett Hughes (*Men and their Work*, *The Sociological Eye*), Phillip Elliott (*The Sociology of the Professions*), Magali Sarfatti Larson (*The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis*) and Harold Perkin (*The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*). For a feminist account of professional ideology, see Anne Witz's *Professions and Patriarchy*.

<sup>40</sup> See T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*, 68.

<sup>41</sup> Max Weber also connects professionalism with the rationalism that he regards as symptomatic of Western capitalism. See George Ritzer, 'Professionalization, Bureaucratization and Rationalization: The Views of Max Weber,' for an explanation of this idea. Felski explicitly concentrates on the gendered nature of this split between rational production and irrational consumption, which will later be crucial to my argument.

<sup>42</sup> For an account of this debate, see for example K. J. Fielding, 'Thackeray and the Dignity of Literature.' For an interesting and more recent interpretation of Thackeray's response to the debate as portrayed in *Pendennis*, see Craig Howes, 'Pendennis and the Controversy on the "Dignity of Literature."'

<sup>43</sup> The *Westminster Review*'s review of *Strathmore* (1865) is one example of a review that categorises Ouida as "Sensational" (568).

<sup>44</sup> Those who have observed the predominance of metaphors of food and addiction in contemporary responses to sensation fiction include Barbara Leckie in chapter three of *Culture and Adultery: The Novel, The Newspaper, and the Law 1857-1914* and Wynne, 4-7. A general discussion of the reception of sensation fiction, which includes discussion of food metaphors, is Ellen Miller Casey's "'Highly Flavoured Dishes" and "Highly Seasoned Garbage": Sensation in the *Athenaeum*.'

<sup>45</sup> Deane points out that "[d]epending on the traditional hierarchy of mind and body, the distinction between aesthetic taste and physical 'cravings' acquired a particularly important function during the nineteenth century as a way to police symbolically the leveling influences of mass culture (as indeed it continues to operate today)" (70).

<sup>46</sup> Consequently, for all the radicalism the Romantic poets might profess, they assumed that the public was in need of instruction and believed that it was the duty of the uniquely

gifted poet to do this. Of the Victorian poets, the difficulty and obscurity of Robert Browning's work is notable as a foreshadowing of modernist professional autonomy (see 118).

<sup>47</sup> This is not, of course, to suggest that the difficulty of the modernist writing did not serve other, more serious, purposes.

<sup>48</sup> Although this conception of the emotional, irrational, intuitive female author was overwhelmingly dominant during the mid-Victorian period, it is worth pointing out that there were some dissenting critical voices. The most notable of these is John Stuart Mill in his 1869 *The Subjection of Women*, which attends to the question of women's skill at writing, amongst other things. Mill believes that women's socialisation means that "their nature cannot but have been" so "greatly distorted and disguised" that it is impossible to tell what it would be like had it been "left to choose its direction as freely as men's" (305). Despite this, he attempts an analysis of women's character as it manifests itself in its current, socialised state. Thus he examines, for example, women's particular skill at "intuition," which, by defining it as the capacity to deduce "objective fact" (306), he interprets as an eminently *rational* quality. He consequently compares women's intuition with the quality of deducing general principles more readily associated with men, and concludes that women's capacity for "objective fact" is a remedy for those whose bent for deducing general principles leads them to "often not only overlook the contradiction which outward facts oppose to their theories, but lose sight of the legitimate purpose of speculation altogether, and let their speculative faculties go astray into regions not peopled with real beings, animate or inanimate." In contrast with such irrationality, women, according to Mill, "seldom ru[n] wild after an abstraction" (306).

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, Chapter 1 of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* or Percy Bysshe Shelley's preface to 'Laon and Cythna.'

<sup>50</sup> David Masson, for example, found "a knowingness, an air of general ability and scholarship" (10) characteristic of Thackeray in 1851, while Whitwell Elwin, a reviewer for the *Quarterly Review*, claimed in 1855 that both "the perennial flow of his [Thackeray's] easy and graceful language" (181) and "Numerous phrases and fragments [in his] sentences attest his familiarity with the classic authors of his country" (180-1). The *Edinburgh Review*'s review of *Guy Livingstone*, similarly, declares the novel's "composition" to be "remarkably careful and scholar-like" (536).

<sup>51</sup> Carol T. Christ makes the same point in "'The Hero as Man of Letters': Masculinity and Victorian Nonfiction Prose," 22.

<sup>52</sup> In a slightly different vein, Elaine Showalter argues that "the biological creativity of childbirth seemed to [the Victorians] directly to rival the aesthetic creativity of writing" (*Literature* 76).

<sup>53</sup> Helen Killoran's article in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* claims that during the Langham years Ouida was earning £5000 per annum (895). In doing so, she repeats a myth first formulated in Florentine gossip in the 1870s and 1880s (Lee 73) and reproduced uncritically by, amongst others, French, Bigland, Stirling and Allen. Phillips's research shows that Chapman and Hall only paid Ouida £150 for the first-edition rights to *Under Two Flags*, while "five books later she received only £900 for *Folle-Farine*," the last of her novels to be published in England. In 1874 Ouida was, according to Phillips, so "[d]esperate for ready cash" that she assigned her copyright in *Under Two Flags* to Chapman for "less than £150" (67). *Under Two Flags* was an enormously successful novel,

but, as Phillips shows, very little of its profits were ever received by Ouida. According to Elizabeth Lee, Ouida herself said that the most she was ever paid for a novel was £1,600.

<sup>54</sup> The pseudonym Ouida itself is, as Jordan notes, “a name significantly untethered by a patronymic, unspecific as to ... nationality” (76).

<sup>55</sup> As the *London Review* said in its 1866 review of *Chandos*, “the book ... possess[es] sufficient merit to prove that its author ought to be able to produce something better than [it] can boast” (707).

<sup>56</sup> See Chapter Three for a discussion of another example of fluid boundaries between author and character that is even more complex than that outlined here.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, MacCabe’s *Tracking the Signifier*, especially the essay ‘Realism and the Cinema: Notes on Some Brechtian Theses’; Barthes’s *S/Z*; Eagleton’s *Criticism and Ideology*.

<sup>58</sup> According to Jeanie Forte, “realism ... supports the dominant ideology by constructing the reader as a subject (or more correctly, an ‘individual’) within that ideology. It poses an apparently objective or distanced viewpoint from which both the narrator and the reader can assess the action and ultimate meaning of the text, a pose which makes the operations of ideology covert, since the illusion is created for the reader that he or she is the source of meaning or understanding, unfettered by structures of culture” (115). Elin Diamond likewise argues in the context of theatrical realism that, “realism, more than any other form of theater representation, mystifies the process of theatrical signification. Because it naturalizes the relation between character and actor, setting and world, realism operates in concert with ideology. And because it depends on, insists on a *stability* of reference, an objective world that is the source and guarantor of knowledge, realism surreptitiously reinforces (even if it argues with) the arrangements of that world. Realism’s fetishistic attachment to the true

referent and the spectator's invitation to rapturous identification with a fictional imago serve the ideological function of mystifying the means of material production, thereby concealing historical contradictions, while reaffirming or mirroring the 'truth' of the status quo" (60-1).

<sup>59</sup> All of the feminist criticisms of realism described above are open to criticism. For example, the Belseyian critique of realism ignores the extent to which the nineteenth century realists, at least, were far from complacent about their ability to depict reality. Levine in particular has been instrumental in displacing this assumption, and argues that "[t]he Victorian ... did write with the awareness of the possibilities of indeterminate meaning and of solipsism .... With remarkable frequency, they are alert to the arbitrariness of the reconstructed order toward which they point as they imply the inadequacy of traditional texts and, through self-reference and parody, the tenuousness of their own" (4). Moreover, as Patricia Schroeder points out, women can (and have) use realism as a tool to draw attention to the ways in which they are oppressed (29). Other critics have found Cixousian essentialism problematic. In summarising this critical response, Schroeder states that "this belief in essential and universal female difference—even superiority—really just inverts the bipolar, patriarchal model that cultural feminists otherwise protest, replicating hegemonic thinking in a feminist context. Furthermore, defining male and female as opposites, thus positing biological sex as the primary determinant of identity, elides the enormous differences among women" (24). Also see Prendergast, 8-9, for criticism of Cixous from a different perspective.

<sup>60</sup> There is an enormous amount of material on the Victorian crisis of faith. For a good discussion of the impact of Biblical criticism and geology on theology in Britain, see Gerald Parsons's essay 'Biblical Criticism in Victorian Britain: From Controversy to Acceptance?' For a good introduction to religious responses to Darwin, see Chapter VIII, 'Evolutionary

Theory and Religious Belief,' of John Hedley Brooke's *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*.

<sup>61</sup> As cited in Chapter One, R. H. Hutton also argues that "You can always see a kind of intellectual framework, of some sort, in a man's novels, which tells you that the unity is given rather by the mind and conception of the narrator, than by the actual evolution of the story." While this suggests that the novels of women writers succeed at achieving unity in their fiction, by linking the production of such as unity to the "evolution of the story," rather than to intellectual effort, Hutton downplays women writers' agency in their novels' unity.

<sup>62</sup> Briefly, Mulvey argues that the audience in mainstream cinema looks with a gaze that on one hand is analogous to Freud's theory of scopophilia in its "pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight" (18), and on the other hand, in a process resembling the moment of (mis)recognition theorised by Lacan in the mirror stage, "demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like" (18). That gaze is, according to Mulvey, structured along to gender lines, with "pleasure in looking ... split between active/male and passive/female," the latter of whom "connote[s] *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (19, italics in original). While the "presence of woman" on screen "tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (19), the hero has the "active" role of "advancing the story, making things happen" (20). Mulvey also argues that the audience must deal with the fear of castration, which it does either by fetishising the woman as erotic object or through a sadistic, voyeuristic gaze.

<sup>63</sup> See the previous chapter. For general accounts of the splitting of high art from popular art, see, for example, Huyssen's *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*; Heyck's *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England*;



Alison Pease's *Modernism, Mass Culture and the Aesthetics of Obscenity*. For critical accounts of the split between high art and popular art as it related to the novel, see, for example, Deane's *The Making of the Victorian Novelist*, which is discussed in Chapter Three; Keating's *The Haunted Study* and Tuchman's *Edging Women Out*. A less scholarly, but still useful, account is John Carey's *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939*.

<sup>64</sup> Della Stufa was the Court Chamberlain to King Victor Emmanuel and he was generally believed by Florentine society to be having an affair with Ross, author of the classic cookbook *Leaves from Our Tuscan Kitchen* (1899) and the wife of Henry Ross. Although Ross and della Stufa were close friends, a recent biographer of Ross, Sarah Benjamin, argues that the rumours were probably false, and it "is more likely that the relationship between Janet and [della Stufa] was not romantic in nature, and that Janet had no overt sexual interest in him" (72). After meeting della Stufa in 1871, Ouida fell in love with him. It is not clear how much he encouraged their relationship; most accounts, however, agree that Ouida "exaggerated abominably" (Bigland 126) his feelings for her, to quote from one of the more sympathetic accounts of their relationship. Following Elizabeth Lee, Bigland contends that Ouida misunderstood della Stufa's Latin "flowery words and notes" for "absolute proof of his adoration" (126), although she suggests that he may have been "genuinely attracted by Ouida's *mind*" (124). Others, like Ouida's friend Lady Paget, believed that della Stufa was merely attracted by the promise of Ouida's money: "He, of course, poor man, had thought at first that all these Worth toilettes and carriages and opera boxes and bric-à-brac, meant mints of money" (*Linings* 227). Perhaps the most plausible explanation is Benjamin's suggestion that della Stufa was in fact homosexual and found the rumours of his love affairs with Ross (and presumably Ouida, too) convenient. What *is* clear

is that at some point, probably alarmed by Ouida's increasingly urgent exhortations of marriage, della Stufa abandoned her. Ouida subsequently convinced herself, in Bigland's words, that he "was being kept from her *against his will*" (129) by Ross and publicly ridiculed herself by denouncing Ross and relentlessly pursuing her "terrified" (132) former lover.

<sup>65</sup> There were, however, enough elements of truth in the novel for Ross, della Stufa and Ouida to be instantly recognisable to the expatriate British community in Florence and for Ross's friends to urge her to take libel action against Ouida (Bigland 142). Indeed, according to Bigland, *Friendship* caused such a furore that in the ensuing controversy "[m]arriages were ruined, engagements broken, [and] life-long associations smashed to smithereens" (141). Many of Ouida's acquaintances were so disgusted with the novel that they refused to have anything more to do with her. Although Ross herself declined to sue for libel, she had her private revenge, according to Benjamin, by keeping "a copy of the book, without its binding, in the lavatory for guests to read" (73). For accounts of the reception of *Friendship* in Italy, see Bigland, 140-2; Yvonne ffrench, *Ouida: A Study in Ostentation*, 78-80; Elizabeth Lee, *Ouida: A Memoir*, 94.

<sup>66</sup> *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* actually sold for two pence, but accuracy was never Ouida's strong point. Certainly these journals fit her description here much more accurately than the penny dreadfuls.

<sup>67</sup> This link between literary realism and Dutch painting was a fairly routine one. A more complimentary comparison than that made by Bagehot can be found in Eliot's famous discussion of realism in Book Second of *Adam Bede*, in which she describes her "delight" in the "rare quality of truthfulness" that she sees "in many Dutch paintings" (177).

<sup>68</sup> On the influence of de Staël on Anna Jameson, see Judith Johnston, *Anna Jameson: Victorian, Feminist, Woman of Letters*, 186. On de Staël's influence on Mary Shelley, see Kenneth Churchill, *Italy and English Literature 1764-1930*, Chapter 5. See chapter nine of Ellen Moers *Literary Women* for general discussion about the influence of *Corinne* on women writers.

<sup>69</sup> Ouida's emphasis on the penalty of this "abandonment of self" is also telling, hinting at the impact of the denial of subjectivity on women. They are imprisoned, flung to "Sappho's death," a loss that is, the passage continues, "beyond all others" (27).

<sup>70</sup> Luce Irigaray sees wonder as a possible key to a non-exploitative relationship between men and women in which both are subjects. She argues that, "This passion has no opposite or contradiction and exists always as though for the first time. Thus man and woman, woman and man are always meeting as though for the first time because they cannot be substituted one for another. I will never be in a man's place, never will a man be in mine" (12-3).

<sup>71</sup> See Ian Fletcher's 'Some Aspects of Aestheticism,' 6-10 and 20-24 for a discussion of novelistic satires of aestheticism.

<sup>72</sup> *Princess Napraxine* was also published the same year that Joris-Karl Huysmans issued his landmark novel *À Rebours* in France, a novel that was to be a key influence on both Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and the decadence of the 1890s.

<sup>73</sup> Fletcher sees elements of aestheticism occurring in Britain as early as the late eighteenth-century, in the writing of Richard Payne Knight (4), and continues to trace it in the Syncretic Society of the 1840s and the work of Sir Charles and Lady Eastlake in the 1850s and 1860s. Fletcher cites Janice Nadelhaft's argument that *Punch's* "attacks on Aestheticism had begun as early as 1841" (5) and also identifies early critiques of

aestheticism in W. E. Aytoun's 1854 dramatic poem *Firmilian*, and Charles Kingsley's 1857 novel *Two Years Ago*. He considers that by 1894 "the Aesthetic Movement was dead" (4), a view that aligns with Nicholas Shrimpton's argument that aestheticism "was already in decline in the 1880s" and "[d]espite Wilde's continuing attempts to publicize its beliefs and achievements, Swinburne's retreat to Putney in September 1879, and Rossetti's death in April 1882, had marked the end of the movement in its most vital, original and coherent phase" (2). As Shrimpton recognises, numerous studies of British aestheticism use a much longer definition of aestheticism, with work by scholars such as Regenia Gagnier, Jonathan Freedman and Talia Schaffer focusing on aestheticism in the 1890s and sometimes even extending into the early twentieth century.

<sup>74</sup> See Diana Maltz's *British Aestheticism and the Urban Working Classes, 1870-1900: Beauty for the People* for a detailed study of missionary aestheticism. Missionary aestheticism is also discussed by Fletcher (24-9).

<sup>75</sup> Recent scholars have proposed alternative ways of dealing with the problem of defining aestheticism. Freedman sees aestheticism as characterised by "the ability, inclination, or even the desire to hold onto contradictory assertions without giving up either their contradictoriness or the wish somehow to unify them" (6). Following Schaffer, Maltz sees the best chance for definition in the idea of "a map of aestheticism" (20) in which various manifestations of the movement overlap each other.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Swinburne is clearly alluded to in the 1879 cartoon 'Aesthetic Pride,' the young painter in which both resembles him and is called Algernon (the same name that Du Maurier gives to the "Æsthetic Bridegroom" in 'The Six-Mark Tea-Pot'). In addition to Wilde's depiction in 'The Six-Mark Tea-Pot,' allusions to him are evident in references to lilies, such in 'An Aesthetic Midday Meal' (1880) and 'The Appalling Diffusion of Taste'

(1881) The women in cartoons like ‘The Six-Mark Tea-Pot,’ ‘Frustrated Social Ambition’ (1881) and ‘Nincompoopiana’ (1880) are parodies of the women in Rossetti’s paintings. Whistler is alluded to in ‘The Diffusion of Æsthetic Taste,’ for example, which features a husband and wife ruminating over a painting of a “mysterious black-and-yellow smudge” with the word “nocturne” in the title. While Du Maurier was *Punch*’s most prolific satirist of aestheticism, his caricatures were also supplemented in *Punch* by articles and caricatures written by other writers and artists, such as the Grosvenor Gallery Gems series, which lampooned the artistic pretensions of the aesthetic exhibitors at that gallery.

<sup>77</sup> As Hamilton points out, “There can be little doubt that the part of Reginald Bunthorne, the Fleshly Poet in Gilbert’s opera, is a mild satire upon Swinburne” (49), while Archibald Grosvenor “is as undoubtedly intended for Mr. Wilde” (49). There are also plenty of references to lilies (associated with Wilde), while Patience’s attempt at aesthetic love—the “heart-whole ecstasy that withers, and scorches, and burns, and stings” (31)—is clearly parodying Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads*. Rossetti is suggested in the reference to “damozels” (34) and in Bunthorne’s reference to Robert Buchanan’s influential 1871 essay ‘The Fleshly School of Poetry’ (9) (which of course also suggests Swinburne, who was also the subject of Buchanan’s attack). The reference to “germs” (13) alludes to the Pre-Raphaelite journal *The Germ*. In addition, references to Japanese art (11, 13) and blue china (22) evoke Rossetti, Wilde and Whistler.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, central to Wilde’s theory are “men ... who seek for experience itself and not for the fruits of experience, who must burn always with one of the passions of this fiery-coloured world, who find life interesting not for its secret but for its situations, for its pulsations and not for its purpose; the passion for beauty engendered by the decorative arts will be to them more satisfying than any political or religious enthusiasm, any enthusiasm

for humanity, any ecstasy or sorrow for love” (26). Wilde’s endorsement of individual impressions as the most significant experience possible in life is obviously derived from the Conclusion to Pater’s *Renaissance*, in which readers are urged to grasp at the fleeting “impressions” that are all that is possible in individual “Experience” (248). Wilde’s advocacy of “intensified individualism” (4) is also very much reminiscent of Pater, for whom individual experience arrives at the point of solipsism: “Experience ... is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without” (248). The similarity in language reinforces the parallels between Pater’s and Wilde’s texts. Wilde’s description of men who “burn always with one of the passions of this fiery-coloured world” is really a rewriting of Pater’s famous statement that “To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life” (250), while Wilde’s use of the word “pulsations” to describe aesthetic experience is presumably derived from Pater (“For our one change lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time” (*Renaissance* 252)).

<sup>79</sup> See Lady Paget’s *The Linings of Life* for a first-hand account of Ouida braving rain and wind at the beach in “gilt slippers, and cream silk flounces” so as to watch “splendid white-crested waves” (391).

<sup>80</sup> Hughes’s essays are ‘A Fin-de-Siècle Beauty and the Beast: Configuring the Body in Works by “Graham R. Tomson” (Rosamund Marriott Watson)’ and ‘A Female Aesthete at the Helm: *Sylvia’s Journal* and ‘Graham R. Tomson,’ published in 1995 and 1996 respectively.

<sup>81</sup> The usual starting point for an analysis of Victorian consumer culture is the Great Exhibition of 1851, which according to Thomas Richards “inaugurated a way of seeing

things that marked indelibly the cultural and commercial life of Victorian England and fashioned a mythology of consumerism that has endured to this day” (18). Thomas explains how in the Great Exhibition commodities became “no longer the trivial things that Marx has once said they could be mistaken for; they [were] a sensual feast for the eye of the spectator” and at this moment it became “possible to talk expressly and excessively about commodities” (21). The hitherto unknown importance that commodities assumed in the Great Exhibition consequently shaped the development of consumer culture in the decades to come.

<sup>82</sup> See Bill Lancaster’s *The Department Store: A Social History* for more information on the rise of the department store in nineteenth century Britain.

<sup>83</sup> Christoph Lindner’s *Fictions of Commodity Culture: From the Victorian to the Postmodern* registers the shift from a concern with production to a concern with consumption in the nineteenth century. While Lindner considers Gaskell’s fiction to be concerned with production rather than consumption, the other nineteenth-century authors he considers—Thackeray, Trollope and Conrad—are read for their engagement with consumption.

<sup>84</sup> Gagnier’s theories have been challenged, most notably by Josephine Guy, who points out that Pater has an elitist view of aesthetic choice that runs counter to the democratic spine of the individualism found in commodity culture in which, according to Jevons, “all choices are legitimate” (164). Guy also argues that Pater and Jevons have radically different conceptions of individual experience. Where Pater values the uniqueness of individual experience, which he sees as “incomparable” (161), Jevons sees “this view of subjectivity” as “a problem, one which needs to be overcome by theoretical abstraction, by the objectifying, quantifying, *generalizing* language of science (or mathematics)” (161).

<sup>85</sup> As Lawrence Danson says, “Wilde often brings Pater to mind” (13); ‘The Critic as Artist,’ for example, “takes Pater’s work as a starting-point so often that it would be tedious to record all its specific echoes or homages, plagiarisms or purposeful distortions” (14).

<sup>86</sup> Schaffer specifically links women’s interior decorating with homemade artefacts rather than purchased commodities, but women were of course also responsible for purchasing decorative goods such as furniture, carpet and wallpaper.

<sup>87</sup> For example, Baudrillard argues in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* that in the hyperreal, labour is not “a power” but “one sign amongst many” that is “commutable with every other sector of everyday life” (10).

<sup>88</sup> Richards argues that this aspect of late nineteenth-century commodity culture was, amongst other things, first formulated in the Great Exhibition of 1851, which “foregrounded” the “gadget”: a “mechanical device so specialized as to be practically useless” (33).

<sup>89</sup> According to Andrew H. Miller in *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative*, “the desire for goods” in Victorian society generally “was contained by representing women as objects themselves” (66). Male aesthetes might therefore be considered to be participating in a broader cultural displacement of involvement in consumer culture onto women’s bodies.

<sup>90</sup> Campbell also suggests the solipsism of modern consumer culture when he describes how the imaginative element of consumption means that “no two individuals’ experience of [a] product will be the same” (92).

<sup>91</sup> See Judith Williamson’s *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* for a paradigmatic discussion of the way in which cultural meaning attaches itself to commodities. See also Barthes’s essay on the ‘Rhetoric of the Image.’



<sup>92</sup> See, for example, Wilde's 1882 lectures on 'Art and the Handicraftsman' and 'House Decoration.'

<sup>93</sup> As Gagnier says, "Oscar Wilde wanted to have it all ways" (*Idylls* 3).

<sup>94</sup> Lindner's *Fictions of Commodity Culture* discusses responses to the solipsism of consumer culture in novels by Thackeray and Joseph Conrad. See in particular 51-60 and 105-10.

<sup>95</sup> The most extensive critique of Tuchman's and Fortin's thesis is Ellen Casey Miller's 'Edging Women Out?: Reviews of Women Novelists in the *Athenaeum*, 1860-1900' (1996).

<sup>96</sup> See Max Beerbohm's essay 'Ouida' (1899), republished in *Works and More*; Vernon Lee's essay 'About Ouida' in the *Westminster Gazette* (1907); and G. S. Street's 'An Appreciation of Ouida' (1895) in the *Yellow Book*.

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